

S I X T E E N  
S E R M O N S,

Preached on  
Several Subjects.

By the Most Reverend  
Dr. *J O H N T I L L O T S O N*  
Late Lord Arch-Bishop of *Canterbury*.

Being The *T H I R D V O L U M E* ;  
Published from the Originals,  
By *Ralph Barker*, D. D. Chaplain to his Grace.

*L O N D O N*,  
Printed for *Ri. Chiswell*, at the *Rose*  
and *Crown* in *St. Paul's Church-yard*,  
*MDCXCVI*.





*The most Reverend*  
**DR. JOHN TILLOTSON**  
*late ArchBishop of Canterbury.*

SIXTEEN  
SERMONS,

Preached on  
Several Subjects.

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A  
S E R M O N  
O N

GALAT. I. 8, 9.

*But tho' We, or an Angel from Heaven preach any other Gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other Gospel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accursed.*

**B**Efore I come to handle the words, for our better understanding of them, I shall give a brief account of the occasion of them, which was this. Some false Apostles had made

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a great disturbance in the Churches planted by the Apostles of Christ, by teaching that it was necessary for Christians, not only to embrace, and entertain the Doctrines and Precepts of the Christian Religion ; but likewise to be Circumcised, and keep the Law of *Moses*. Of this disturbance which was raised in the Christian Church, you have the History at large, *Acts* 15. and as in several other Churches, so particularly in that of *Galatia*, these false Apostles and Seducers had perverted many, as appears by this Epistle ; in the beginning whereof St. *Paul* complains, that those who were seduced into this Error of the necessity of Circumcision, and keeping the Law of *Moses*, had by this new Article of Faith, which they had added to the Christian Religion, quite altered the frame of it, and made the Gospel another thing from that which our Saviour delivered, and commanded his Apostles to teach all Nations.

For he tells us, *ver.* 6. of this Chapter, that *he marvelled, that they were so soon removed from him that called them by (or through) the grace of Christ, unto another*

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*another Gospel*, that is, so different from that which they had been instructed in by those who first preached the Gospel unto them : For the making of any thing necessary to Salvation, which our Saviour in his Gospel had not made so, he calls *another Gospel*. *I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you by the grace of Christ, unto another Gospel, which is not another, οἷον ἄλλο*, which is no other thing, or by which I mean nothing else, but that there are some that trouble you, and would pervert the Gospel of Christ ; as if he had said, when I say that ye are removed to another Gospel, I do not mean, that ye have renounced Christianity, and are gone over to another Religion, but that ye are seduced by those who have a mind to pervert the Gospel of Christ, by adding something to it, as a necessary and essential part of it, which Christ hath not made so : This the Apostle calls a perverting or overthrowing of the Gospel ; because by thus altering the Terms and Conditions of it, they made it quite another thing from what our Saviour delivered it.

And then at the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> verses he denounceth a terrible *Anathema* against those, whoever they should be, yea tho' it were an Apostle, or an Angel from Heaven, who by thus *perverting the Gospel of Christ* (that is by making any thing necessary to be believed or practised, which our Saviour in his Gospel had not made so) should in effect *preach another Gospel*; but tho' we, or an Angel from Heaven, *preach any other Gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be Anathema, an accursed thing.* And then to express his confidence and vehemency in this matter, and to shew that he did not speak this rashly, and in a heat, but upon due consideration, he repeats it again in the next verse, *As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other Gospel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accursed.*

From the words thus explained by the consideration of the Context, and of the main scope and design of this Epistle, these following *Observations* do naturally arise.

*First,*

*First*, That the addition of any thing to the Christian Religion, as necessary to be believed and practised in order to Salvation, is *a perverting the Gospel of Christ, and preaching another Gospel.*

*Secondly*, That no pretence of Infallibility is sufficient to authorise and warrant the addition of any thing to the Christian Doctrine, as necessary to be believed and practised in order to Salvation.

*Thirdly*, That Christians may judge and discern when such additions are made.

*Fourthly*, and consequently, That since the declaration of the Gospel, and the confirmation of it, there is no Authority in the Christian Church, to impose upon Christians any thing as of necessity to Salvation, which the Gospel hath not made so.

*Fifthly*, That there is no visible Judge (how Infallible soever he may pretend to be) to whose definitions

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and declarations in Matters of Faith and Practice, necessary to Salvation, we are bound to submit, without examination, whether these things be agreeable to the Gospel of Christ, or not.

*Sixthly, and Lastly, Whosoever teacheth any thing as of necessity to Salvation, to be believed or practised, besides what the Gospel of Christ hath made necessary, does fall under the Anathema here in the Text ; because in so doing, he perverteth the Gospel of Christ, and preacheth another Gospel.* Now the Apostle expressly declares, *that tho' we (that is, he himself, or any of the Apostles) or an Angel from Heaven, preach any other Gospel unto you, than what we have preached unto you, let him be accursed : As we said before, so say I now again, if any man preach any other Gospel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accursed.*

I. That the addition of any thing to the Christian Religion, as necessary to be believed or practised in order to Salvation, is *a perverting the Gospel of Christ, and preaching another Gospel.*

This



This is evident from the Instances here given in this Epistle ; for the Apostle chargeth the false Apostles, with *perverting the Gospel of Christ, and preaching another Gospel*, upon no other account, but because they added to the Christian Religion, and made Circumcision, and the keeping of the Law of *Moses*, an essential part of the Christian Religion, and imposed upon Christians the practice of these things, and the belief of the necessity of them, as a Condition of Eternal Salvation.

That this was the Doctrine of those false Teachers, we find expressly, *Acts 15. 1. And certain men which came down from Judea, taught the Brethren, and said, except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved;* and *ver. 24. in the Letter written by the Apostles and Elders at Jerusalem, to the Churches abroad, there is this account given of it ; forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us, have troubled you with words, subverting your Souls, saying ye must be circumcised, and keep the Law, to whom we gave no such Commandment.* Where



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you see that this Doctrine is declared to be of pernicious consequence, tending to *subvert the Souls of Men*, and likewise to be an addition to the Doctrine of the Gospel which was delivered by the Apostles, who here with one consent declare, that *they had given no such commandment*; that is; had delivered no such Doctrine as this, nor put any such yoke upon the necks of Christians; but on the contrary had declared, that the death of Christ having put an end to the *Jewish Dispensation*, there was now no obligation upon Christians to observe the Law of *Moses*.

And from the Reason of the thing it is very plain, that the addition of any thing to the Christian Religion, as necessary to be believed or practised in order to Salvation, which the Gospel hath not made so, is *preaching another Gospel*; because it makes an essential change in the Terms and Conditions of the Gospel Covenant, which declares Salvation unto Men upon such and such Terms, and no other. Now to add any other Terms to these, as of equal necessity with them, is to alter  
the

the Condition of the Covenant of the Gospel, and the Terms of the Christian Religion, and consequently *to preach another Gospel*, by declaring other Terms of Salvation, than Christ in his Gospel hath declared, which is *to pervert the Gospel of Christ*.

II. No pretence of Infallibility is sufficient to Authorise and Warrant the addition of any thing to the Christian Doctrine, as necessary to be believed or practised, in order to Salvation. After the delivery of the Gospel by the Son of God, and the publication of it to the World by his Apostles, who were Commissioned and Inspired by him to that purpose, and the confirmation of all, by the greatest and most unquestionable Miracles that ever were, no person whatever, that brought any other Doctrine, and declared Salvation to Men upon any other terms than those which are declared in the Gospel, was to be credited, what pretence soever he should make to a Divine Commission, or an Infalible Assistance. The Apostle makes a Supposition as high as can be, *tho' ne* (says he) *or an Angel from Heaven preach any other*

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*other Gospel unto you, than that which we have preached unto you, let him be an Anathema.* If the Apostles themselves, who were Divinely Commissioned and Infallibly assisted in the Preaching of the Gospel, should afterwards make any addition to it, or declare any other Terms of Salvation, than those which are declared in the Gospel which they had already published to the World, they ought not to be regarded.

And the Reason is plain; because what claim soever any Person may make to Infallibility, and what demonstration soever he may give of it, we cannot possibly believe him, if he contradict himself, and deliver Doctrines which do plainly clash with one another: For if he spake true at first, I cannot believe him declaring the contrary afterwards: And if he did not speak true at first, I cannot believe him at all; because he can give no greater proof of his Divine Commission, and Infallible Assistance and Inspiration, than he did at first.

And

And the Reason is the same, if *an Angel from Heaven* should come and preach a contrary Doctrine to that of the Gospel, *he* were not to be believed neither ; because he could bring no better Credentials of his Divine Commission and Authority, than Those had who publish'd the Gospel, and consequently he ought not to be credited in any thing contrary to what they had publish'd before. For tho' a Man were never so much disposed to receive a Revelation from God, and to submit his Faith to it ; yet it is not possible for any Man to believe God against God himself ; that is, to believe two Revelations, plainly contradictory to one another, to be from God ; and the reason of this is very obvious ; because every Man doth first and more firmly believe this Proposition or Principle, *That Contradictions cannot be true*, than any Revelation whatsoever ; for if Contradictions may be true, then no Revelation from God can signify any thing, because the contrary may be equally true, and so truth and falsehood be all one.

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The Apostle indeed only makes a *Supposition*, when he says, *tho' we, or an Angel from Heaven, preach any other Doctrine unto you* ; but by this *Supposition* he plainly bars any Man, or Company of Men, from adding to the Christian Religion any Article of Faith or Point of Practice, as of necessity to Salvation, which the Gospel hath not made so ; I say any Man, or Company of Men, whatever Authority or Infallibility they may lay claim to, because they cannot pretend to a clearer Commission, and greater Evidence of Infallible Assistance, than *an Apostle, or an Angel from Heaven*, and yet the Text tells us, *that* would not be a sufficient warrant to preach another Gospel ; it might indeed bring in question that which they had preached before, but could not give Credit and Authority to any thing plainly contrary to it, and inconsistent with it.

III. Christians may judge and discern when *another Gospel is preached*, when new Articles of Faith, or Points of Practice, not enjoyed by the Gospel, are imposed upon Christians. This  
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the Apostle supposeth every particular Church, and for ought I know every particular Christian, that is duly Instructed in the Christian Religion, to be a competent Judge of, and to be sufficiently able to discern when *another Gospel is preached*, and new Terms and Conditions, not declared in the Gospel, are added to the Christian Religion; for if they be not able to judge of this, the Apostle does in vain caution them against the seduction of those *who perverted the Doctrine of Christ, and endeavoured to remove them from him that had called them by the grace of Christ, unto another Gospel.*

It may perhaps be said, that there was no need that they should be able to discern and judge of the Doctrines of those false Teachers, it was sufficient for them to believe the Apostle concerning the Doctrines of those Seducers, when he declared to them the falsehood and pernicious consequence of them. But the Apostle speaks to them upon another supposition, which does necessarily imply, that they were able to discern and judge what Doctrines were agreeable to the Gospel,  
and



and what not ; for he puts the Case, that if he himself, or any of the Apostles, or an Angel from Heaven, should preach to them another Doctrine, contrary to that of the Gospel, they ought to reject it with detestation ; but this doth necessarily suppose them able to judge, when such Doctrines were preached, and consequently that all things necessary to be believed and practised by all Christians are clearly and plainly declared in the Gospel ; all the Doctrines whereof are now contained in the Holy Scriptures, in which all things necessary to Faith and a good Life are so plainly delivered, that any sober and inquisitive Person may learn them from thence, and the meanest Capacity, by the help and direction of their Guides and Teachers, may be Instructed in them.

And this is not only the Principle of Protestants, but the express and constant Doctrine of the Ancient Fathers of the Church, whatever the Church of *Rome*, for the maintaining of her usurp'd Authority over the Consciences of Men, pretends to the contrary.



trary. And if this were not so, that Men are able to discern and judge which are the Doctrines of the Gospel, and what is contrary to them; the Doctrine of the Gospel was in vain preached, and the Holy Scriptures containing that Doctrine were written to no purpose.

Some things in Scripture are granted to be obscure and difficult, on purpose to exercise the Study and Enquiries of those who have leisure and capacity for it: but all things necessary are sufficiently plain; otherwise it would be impossible to judge when *another Gospel is preached*, which the Apostle here supposeth the *Galatians* capable of doing. For if the Revelation of the Gospel be not sufficiently plain in all things necessary to be believed and practised, then Christians have no Rule whereby to judge what Doctrines are agreeable to the Gospel, and what not: for an obscure Rule is of no use; that is, in truth is no Rule to those to whom it is obscure.

I proceed to the IVth *Observation*, which is plainly consequent from those  
laid

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laid down before ; namely, that since the Declaration of the Gospel, and the Confirmation given to it, there is no Authority in the Christian Church to impose upon Christians any thing, as of necessity to Salvation, which the Gospel hath not made so.

The Commission given by our Lord and Saviour to his Apostles, was *to preach the Gospel to all Nations*, or (as St. Matthew expresses it) *to go and teach all Nations, to observe all things whatsoever he had commanded them* ; and this is that which we call *the Gospel*, viz. that Doctrine which Christ commanded his Apostles to preach and publish to the World ; and if the Apostles themselves had exceeded their Commission, and added any other points of Faith or Practice to those which our Saviour gave them in charge to teach and publish to the World, they had in so doing been guilty of that which St. Paul here in the Text chargeth the false Apostles with, viz. of *preaching another Gospel* : And if the Apostles had no Authority to add any thing to the Gospel, much less can any pretend to it ; since they have neither so immediate a Commission,

sion, nor such a miraculous power to give testimony to them, that *they are Teachers come from God.*

Now this Doctrine of the Gospel, which the Apostles preached to the World, is that which Christians are so often, and so earnestly by the Apostles in all their Epistles *Exhorted to continue in, and not to suffer themselves to be shaken in mind, by every wind of new Doctrine,* because that which the Apostles had delivered to them, was the intire Doctrine of the Gospel, which was never to receive any addition or alteration. This is that which St. Peter calls *the Holy Commandment which was delivered unto them,* 2 Pet. 2. 21. *It had been better for them not to have known the way of Righteousness, than after they have known it, to turn from the holy Commandment delivered unto them* speaking in all probability of those who were seduced by the errors of the Gnosticks, from the purity of the Christian Doctrine delivered to them by the Apostles. This likewise St. Paul calls *the common Faith,* Titus 1. 4. and St. Jude ver. 3. *the common Salvation;* that is, the Doctrine which contains the com-

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mon Terms of our Salvation, and *the Faith which was once delivered to the Saints*, that is, by the Apostles of our Lord, who publish'd the Gospel; *once delivered*, that is, once for all, so as never afterwards to admit of any change or alteration. This Faith he *exhorts* Christians *earnestly to contend for*, against those several Sects of Seducers, which were crept into the Christian Church, and did endeavour by several Arts to *pervert the Gospel of Christ*, and to deprave *the Faith delivered* by the Apostles.

So that the Doctrine of the Gospel publish'd by the Apostles, is fix'd and unalterable, and there can be no Authority in the Church to make any change in it, either by taking from it, or adding any thing to it, as necessary to be believed or practis'd in order to Salvation.

V. It follows likewise from the foregoing Observations, that there is no *visible Judge* (how much soever he may pretend to *Infallibility*) to whose determination and decision in matters of Faith and Practice necessary  
to

to Salvation, Christians are bound to submit without examination, whether those things be agreeable to the Doctrine of the Gospel, or not.

When our Saviour appeared in the World, tho' he had Authority enough to exact belief from Men, yet because there was a standing Revelation of God made to the *Jews*, he appeals to that Revelation, as well as to his own Miracles, for the truth of what he said, and offered himself, and his Doctrine, to be tried by the agreeableness of it to the Scriptures of the Old Testament, and the Predictions therein concerning him. And this was but reasonable, it being impossible for any Man to receive two Revelations, as from God, without liberty to examine whether they be agreeable to, and consistent with one another. In like manner the Apostles of our Lord and Saviour, tho' they were guided and assisted by an Infallible Spirit, and had an immediate Commission from Christ to preach the Doctrine of the Gospel, did not require from Men absolute submission to their Doctrines and Dictates, without examination of what they delivered, whether



ther it were agreeable to that Divine Revelation which was contained in the ancient Scriptures.

This was St. Paul's constant custom and way of teaching among the *Jews*, who had received the Revelation of the Old Testament ; he did not dictate to them by vertue of his Infallibility, but *reasoned with them out of the Scriptures*, and required their belief no further, than what he said, should upon examination appear agreeable to the Scriptures. So we find *Acts* 17. 2, 3. *And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them* (speaking of the *Jews*) *and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures, opening and alledging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead, and that this Jesus whom I preach unto you, is the Christ.* And *Chap.* 18. 28. *he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publickly, shewing by the Scriptures, that Jesus was the Christ.* And St. Paul was so far from reproving them for examining his Doctrine by the Scriptures, that he commended it, as an argument of a Noble and Generous mind in the *Bereans*, that they did not give full assent  
to

to his Doctrine, 'till upon due search and examination they were satisfied that what he had said was agreeable to the Scriptures. Chap. 17. 11, 12. Where speaking of the Bereans, it is said, *That these were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word, with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so ; therefore many of them believed ;* that is, because upon search they found what he delivered to be agreeable to the Scriptures ; and it was not a slight, but diligent and deliberate search, they took time to examine things thoroughly ; for it is said *they searched the Scriptures daily.* And here in the Text St. Paul puts the case, that if he, or any other of the Apostles, concerning whose Divine Commission and Assistance they were so fully satisfied, should deliver any thing to them contrary to the Gospel which they had formerly preached, they were to reject it with the greatest abhorrence and detestation ; and this necessarily supposeth a liberty to examine what was delivered, even by those whom they believed to be Infallibly assisted, and a capacity to discern



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scern and judge whether what they said was agreeable to the Gospel at first delivered to them, or not.

And after this, shall any Person or Church (what Claim soever they may make to Infallibility) assume to themselves an Authority to dictate in matters of Faith, and that their Dictates ought to be received with an absolute submission, and without liberty to examine whether they be agreeable to *the Faith once delivered to the Saints*; and tho' they add new Articles to the Christian Faith, and of which there is not the least foot-step or intimation in any of the Ancient Creeds of the Christian Church, and do plainly impose upon Christians the Practice and Belief of several things as necessary to Salvation, which the Gospel never declared to be so, yet no body shall judge of this, but every Man ought without more ado, to believe blindfold, and to resign up his Understanding and Judgment to the directions of this *visible Infallible Judge*?

But surely this is not the reasonable *Obedience of Faith*, but the forc'd submission

mission of Slaves to the Tyranny of their Masters. Christians are expressly forbid to call any Man Father or Master upon Earth, because we have one Father and Master in Heaven. Now to make an absolute submission of our Understandings to any upon Earth, so as without examination to receive their Dictates in Matters of Faith, is surely, if any thing can be so, to call such a Person Father and Master, because a greater submission than this we cannot pay to our Father who is in Heaven, even to God himself. I come now to the

Sixth, and last *Observation* from the Text; That whosoever teacheth any thing as of necessity to Salvation, to be believed or practised, besides what the Gospel of Christ hath made necessary, does fall under the *Anathema* here in the Text; because they that do so, do according to the mind of St. Paul, pervert the Gospel of Christ, and Preach another Gospel. For the Reason why he chargeth the false Apostles with Preaching another Gospel, and those that were seduced by them, as being removed from him that called them by the Grace of Christ unto another Gospel,

is plainly this; that they had changed the Terms of the Christian Religion, by adding new Articles to it, which were not contained in the Gospel; that is, by making it necessary to believe it to be so, because *they* taught so. Now St. Paul expressly declares this to be *Preaching another Gospel*, because they plainly alter'd the Terms of Salvation declared in the Gospel, and made that to be necessary to the Salvation of Men, which the Gospel had not made so.

And whatever Person or Church does the same, does incur the same guilt, and falls under the *Anathema* and Censure here in the Text; yea, *tho' he were an Apostle, or an Angel*: And I am sure no Bishop or Church in the World can pretend either to an equal Authority or Infallibility with *an Apostle, or an Angel from Heaven*.

Let us then hear what St. Paul declares in this Case, and consider seriously, with what earnestness and vehemency he declares it; *tho' we* (says he) *or an Angel from Heaven preach any other Gospel unto you, than that which*

which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other Gospel unto you, than that ye have received, let him be accursed. St. Paul you see is very earnest in this matter, and very peremptory, and therefore I cannot but think this Declaration of his to be more considerable, and every way more worthy of our regard and dread, than all the *Anathema's* of the *Council of Trent*, which in direct affront and contempt of this *Anathema* of St. Paul, hath presumed to add so many Articles to the Christian Religion, upon the counterfeit warrant of Tradition, for which there is no ground or warrant from the Scripture, or from any Ancient Creed of the Christian Church.

And for the truth of this, I appeal to the Creed of Pope *Pius* the IVth, compiled out of the Definitions of the *Council of Trent*; by which *Council* the *Pope* only is Authorised to Interpret the true sense and meaning of the Canons and Decrees of that *Council*; and consequently his interpretations must be of equal force and authority with

with that of the *Council* it self. So that whatsoever he hath put into his new Creed for an Article of Faith, ought to be received with the same pious affection and veneration, as if the Creed had been compiled by the *Council* it self; because the *Pope*, it seems, and no body else understands the true meaning of that *Council*, at least is thought fit to declare it. And therefore one may justly wonder at the presumption of those, who after this Declaration of the Council, have taken upon them to *Expound the Catholick Faith*, and to represent that Religion to us, as it is defined in that *Council*; because if there be any Controversie about the meaning of its Definitions (as there have been a great many, even betwixt those who were present at the Council when those Definitions were made) none but the *Pope* himself can certainly tell the meaning of them.

Now in this Creed of Pope *Pius* there are added to the Ancient Creed of the Christian Church twelve or thirteen new Articles, as concerning *Purgatory, Transubstantiation, the Worship of Images, the Invocation of Saints,*  
*the*



*the Communion in one kind, and that the Church of Rome is the Mother and Mistress of all Churches, and that there is no Salvation to be had out of it; and several other Points, all which have either no foundation in Scripture, or are plainly contrary to it, and none of them ever esteemed as Articles of Faith in the Ancient Christian Church for the first five hundred years; and yet they are now obtruded upon Christians, as of equal necessity to Salvation, with the Twelve Articles of the Apostles Creed, and this under a pretence of Infallibility, which St. Paul tells us would not have justified an Apostle, or an Angel from Heaven, in making such additions to the Christian Religion, and the imposing of any thing as necessary to Salvation, which is not so declared by the Gospel of Christ.*

And all that they have to say for this, is, That *We* do not pretend to be Infallible; but there is a necessity of an Infallible Judge to decide these Controversies, and to him they are to be referred. Which is just as if in a plain matter of Right, a contentious and confident Man should desire a reference

ference, and contrive the matter so as to have it refer'd to himself, upon a sleeveless pretence, without any proof or evidence, that he is the only Person in the World that hath Authority and Infallible Skill to decide all such differences. Thus the *Church of Rome* would deal with us in Things which are as plain as the noon-day; as Whether God hath forbidden the Worship of Images in the second Commandment? Whether our Saviour did Institute the Sacrament in both kinds? Whether the People ought not to read the Scriptures, and to have the publick Service of God in a known Tongue? These, and the like, they would have us refer to an Infallible Judge; and when we ask who he is, they tell us that their Church, which hath imposed these things upon Christians, and made these additions to the Gospel of Christ, is that Infallible Judge. But if she were as Infallible as she pretends to be, even as *an Apostle, or an Angel from Heaven*, St. Paul hath denounced an *Anathema* against her, for *preaching another Gospel*, and making those things necessary to the Salvation of Men, which

which are not contained in *the Gospel of Christ*.

The *Inference* from all this Discourse in short, is this; That *we should contend earnestly for the Faith once delivered to the Saints*, and not suffer our selves by the confident pretences of Seducers, to be removed from him that hath called us through the grace of Christ unto another Gospel. The necessary Doctrines of the Christian Religion, and the common Terms of Salvation are so plain, that if any Man be ignorant of them, it is his own fault; and if any go about to impose upon us any thing as of necessity to be believed and practised in order to Salvation, which is not declared to be so in the Holy Scriptures, which contain the true Doctrine of the Gospel, what Authority soever they pretend for it, yea, tho' they assume to themselves to be Infal-  
lible; the Apostle hath plainly told us what we are to think of them; for he hath put the Case as high as is possible here in the Text, when he says, *Tho' We, or an Angel from Heaven preach any other Gospel unto you, than that which*  
we



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*we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.*

I will conclude all with that Counsel which the Spirit of God gives to the Churches of *Asia*, Revel. 3. 3. *Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast ; and Chap. 2. 10. Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer : be thou faithful unto the Death, and I will give thee a Crown of Life.*

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[1312]

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A  
S E R M O N

O N

JOHN. VII. 17.

*If any Man will do his Will, he shall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of my self.*

**S**INCE there are so many different Opinions and Apprehensions in the World about Matters of Religion, and every Sect and Party does with so much confidence pretend that *they*, and *they only*, are in the truth; The great difficulty and question is, by what means Men may be secured from dangerous Errors and Mistakes in Religion. For this end some have

*The Second Sermon.*

have thought it necessary that there should be *an Infallible Church*, in the Communion whereof every Man may be secured from the dangers of a wrong Belief. But it seems God hath not thought this necessary : If he had, he would have revealed this very thing more plainly than any particular Point of Faith whatsoever. He would have told us expressly, and in the plainest terms, that he had appointed *an Infallible Guide and Judge in Matters of Faith*, and would likewise have told us as plainly who he was, and where we might find him, and have recourse to him upon all occasions ; because the sincerity of our Faith depending upon him, we could not be safe from mistake in particular Points, without so plain and clear a Revelation of this *Infallible Judge*, that there could be no mistake about him ; nor could there be an end of any other Controversies in Religion, unless this *Infallible Judge* (both that there is one, and who he is) were out of Controversie. But neither of these are so : It is not plain from Scripture that there is *an Infallible Judge and Guide in Matters of Faith* ; much less is it plain who he is ; and therefore

therefore we may certainly conclude, that God hath not thought it necessary that there should be an *Infallible Guide and Judge in Matters of Faith*, because he hath revealed no such thing to us; and *that Bishop*, and *that Church* who only have arrogated *Infallibility* to themselves, have given the greatest evidence in the World to the contrary; and have been detected, and stand convinc'd of the greatest Errors: And it is in vain for any Man, or Company of Men, to pretend to *Infallibility*, so long as the evidence that *they are deceived* is much greater and clearer than any proof they can produce for their *Infallibility*.

If then God hath not provided an *Infallible Guide and Judge in Matters of Faith*; there is some other way whereby Men may be secured against dangerous and damnable Errors in Religion, and whereby they may discern Truth from Imposture, and what Doctrines are from God, and what not; and this our Saviour declares to us here in the Text, namely, That an honest and sincere mind, and a hearty desire to do the Will of God, is the best Preservative

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tive against fatal Errors and Mistakes in Matters of Religion ; *εάν τις θέλη ποιῆν, If any Man desire to do his Will, he shall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of my self.*

There are *two* dangerous mistakes in Religion : To reject any thing which really comes from God ; and To receive and entertain any thing as from God, which doth not really come from him.

First, To reject any thing which really comes from God. This mistake the *Jews* frequently fell into, when they rejected the true Prophets which God from time to time sent to them, slighting their Message, and persecuting their Persons : but they miscarried most fatally and remarkably in their contempt of the true *Messias*, that great Prophet whom they had so long expected, and whom God sent at last, to bring Salvation to them ; but when he came, they knew him not, nor would receive him, but used him with all the despite and contempt imaginable, not as a *Teacher come from God*, but as a Deceiver, and Impostor.

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Now the danger of rejecting any thing that comes from God, consists in this, that it cannot be done without the highest Affront to the Divine Majesty. To reject a Divine Message, or Revelation, is to oppose God, and *fight against him*. So our Saviour tells the *Jews*, that *in despising him, they despised him that sent him*.

Secondly, There is also another dangerous mistake on the other hand, in entertaining any thing as a Revelation from God, which is not really from him. And this likewise the *Jews* were frequently guilty of, in receiving the false Prophets which spake in the name of the Lord, when he had not sent them. And this is commonly the temper of those who reject the truth, greedily to swallow error and delusion. So our Saviour tells us of the *Jews*, John 5. 43. *I am come in my Fathers name, and ye receive me not; if another shall come in his own name, him ye will receive*. This Prediction of our Saviour's concerning the *Jews*, was fully accomplish'd; for after they had rejected him, who gave such abundant evidence



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that he was the true *Messias*, and a *Teacher sent from God*, they received others, who really *came in their own names*, and ran after those who pretended to be the *Messias*, and were in great numbers destroyed with them. And this is very just with God, that *those who receive not the truth in the love of it, should be given up to strong delusions, to believe lies.*

Now these being the *two* great dangerous Mistakes in Religion which Men are liable to, my Work at this time shall be to shew, how a sincere desire and endeavour *to do the Will of God*, is a security to Men against both those dangers; and it will appear to be so, upon these two accounts.

I. Because he who sincerely desires and endeavours to do the Will of God, is hereby better qualified and disposed to make a right Judgment of Spiritual and Divine things.

II. Because God's Providence is more especially concerned to secure such Persons from dangerous Errors and Mistakes in things which concern their  
Eternal

Eternal Salvation. These shall be the *two* Heads of my following Discourse.

First, Because he who sincerely desires and endeavours to do the Will of God, is hereby better qualified and disposed to make a right Judgment of Spiritual and Divine Things, and that for these *two* Reasons.

I. Because such a Person hath a truer notion of God, and Divine Things.

II. Because he is more impartial in his search and enquiry after Truth.

First, Because such a Person hath a truer notion of God, and Divine Things. No Man is so likely to have clear and true apprehensions of God, as a good Man, because he hath transcribed the Divine perfections in his own mind, and is himself in some measure and degree what God is. And for this Reason it is, that the Scripture so often lays the foundation of all Divine Knowledge in the practice of Religion. *Job 28. 28. The fear of the Lord, that is Wisdom, and to depart from Evil, is Understanding; and Psal. III. 10. The*  
D 3 *fear*

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*fear of the Lord is the beginning of Wisdom* (that is) the Principle and Foundation of it ; *a good understanding have all they that do his Commandments* : Whereas the Vices and Lusts of Men darken their Reason, and distort their Understandings, and fill the Mind with gross and sensual apprehensions of Things, and thereby render Men unfit to discern those Truths which are of a Spiritual Nature and tendency, and altogether indisposed to receive them. For tho' the Vices of Men be properly seated in their Wills, and do not possess their Understandings ; yet they have a bad influence upon them, as Fumes and Vapours from the Stomach are wont to affect the Head.

Nothing indeed is more natural to the Mind and Understanding of Men, than the knowledge of God ; but we may abuse our Faculties, and render them unfit for the discerning even of their proper Objects.

When Men by wicked Practices have rendred themselves unlike to God, they will not love to *retain the knowledge of him* in their Minds, but will  
*become*

*become vain in their imaginations concerning him. What Clouds and Mists are to the Bodily Eye, that the Lusts and Corruptions of Men are to the Understanding; they hinder it from a clear perception of Heavenly Things; the pure in Heart, they are best qualified for the sight of God.*

Now according as a Man's Notions of God are, such will be his apprehensions of Religion. All Religion is either *Natural*, or *Revealed*: *Natural Religion* consists in the belief of a God, and in right conceptions and apprehensions concerning him, and in a due reverence and observance of him, and in a ready and chearful obedience to those Laws which he hath imprinted upon our Nature; and the Sum of our Obedience consists in our conformity to God, and an endeavour to be like him. For, supposing God to have made no external Revelation of his Mind to us, we have no other way to know his Will, but by considering his Nature, and our own; and if so, then he that resembles God most, is like to understand him best, because he finds those perfections in some measure in

*The Second Sermon.*

himself, which he contemplates in the Divine Nature; and nothing gives a Man so sure a notion of things, as practice and experience: Every good Man is in some degree *partaker of a Divine Nature*, and feels that in himself, which he conceives to be in God: So that this Man does experience what others do but talk of; he sees the Image of God in himself, and is able to discourse of him from an inward sense and feeling of his Excellency, and Perfections.

And as for *Revealed Religion*, the only design of that is, to revive and improve the *Natural* Notions which we have of God; and all our Reasonings about Divine Revelation, are necessarily gathered by our Natural Notions of Religion: And therefore he that sincerely endeavours *to do the will of God*, is not apt to be imposed upon by the vain and confident pretences of Divine Revelation; but if any Doctrine be proposed to him, which pretends to come from God, he measures it by those steady and sure Notions which he hath of the Divine Nature and Perfections, and by those he will easily dis-



discern whether it be worthy of God, or not, and likely to proceed from him : He will consider the nature and tendency of it, and whether it be (as the Apostle expresses it) a *Doctrine according to Godliness*, such as is agreeable to the Divine Nature and Perfections, and tends to make us like to God : If it be not, tho' *an Angel from Heaven* should bring it, he will not receive it : If it be, he will not reject it upon every idle pretence, and frivolous exception that prejudiced and ill minded Men may make against it ; but after he is satisfied of the reasonableness and purity of the Doctrine, he will accept of such evidence and confirmation of it, as is fit for God to give to his own Revelations ; and if the Person that brings it, hath the attestation of *Miracles* (which is necessary in case it be a new Doctrine) and if he carry on no Earthly Interest and Design by it, but does by his Life and Actions make it evident that he aims at the glory of God, and the good of Men, in this case, a good Man, whose mind is free from passion and prejudice, will easily assent, that this Man's *Doctrine is of God, and that he does not speak of himself*. This was the



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the Evidence which our Saviour offered to the *Jews*, in vindication of himself, and his Doctrine, *Joh. 7. 18. He that speaketh of himself, seeketh his own glory: but he that seeketh his glory that sent him, the same is true, and no unrighteousness is in him*; as if he had said, hereby may you distinguish one that really comes from God, from an Impostor: If any Man seek his own glory, you may conclude that *God hath not sent him*, but whatever he pretends, that *he speaks of himself*; but he who by his Life, and the course of his Actions demonstrates that *he seeks the honour of God*, and not any interest and advantage of *his own*, the same is true, and there is no unrighteousness in him; that is, no falsehood or design to deceive (for so the word *adikia* does sometimes signifie); you may conclude such an one to be no Deceiver, or Impostor. And if any Man sincerely desires and endeavours to do the will of God, he may by such Marks and Characters as these, judge of any Doctrine that pretends to be from God, whether it be so or not. This is the first Reason; because he that sincerely desires and endeavours to do the will

*will of God*, hath the trueſt notion of God, and of Divine Things.

Secondly, Such a Perſon is more impartial in his ſearch and enquiry after Truth, and therefore more likely to find it, and to diſcern it from Error. He that hath an honeſt mind, and ſincerely endeavours *to do the will of God*, is not apt to be ſwayed and biaſſed by any Intereſt or Luſt: for his great Intereſt is to pleaſe God, and he makes all his other Intereſts and concernments to ſtoop and yield to that. But if a Man be governed by any earthly Intereſt or Deſign, he will meaſure all things by that, and is not at liberty to entertain any thing that croſſes it, and to judge equally of any Doctrine that is oppoſite to his Intereſt. This our Saviour gives for a Reaſon, why the great *Rabbies* and Teachers among the *Jews* did not believe and embrace his Doctrine, *John 5. 44. How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another?* If Men have any other deſign in Religion than to pleaſe God, and to advance his Honour and Glory in the World, no wonder if they be apt to reject the moſt Divine Truths; becauſe theſe

these are Calculated, not to approve us to Men, but to God.

And as Vain-Glory, and a desire of the Applause of Men; so likewise doth every other Lust make a Man partial in his Judgment of things, and clap a false Bias upon his Understanding, which carries it off from Truth, and makes it to lean towards that side of the Question which is most favourable to the Interest of his Lusts. A vicious Man is not willing to entertain those Truths which would cross and check him in his course: He hath made the Truth his Enemy, and therefore he thinks himself concern'd to oppose it, and rise up against it: The light of it offends him, and therefore he shuts his Eyes that he may not see it. Those holy and pure Doctrines, which are from God, reprove the Lusts of Men, and discover the Deformity of them; and therefore no wonder if bad Men be so hard to be reconciled to them. This account our Saviour likewise gives of the fierce Enmity of the Jews to him, and his Doctrine, *Joh. 3. 19, 20. Light is come into the World, and Men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds*

*deeds were evil ; for every one that doeth evil, hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reproved.*

The vicious Inclinations of Men are a dead weight upon their Understandings, and able to draw down the Scales against the clearest Truths : For tho' it be absolutely in no Man's power to believe, or to dis-believe what he will ; yet Men's Lives have many times a great influence upon their Understandings, to make Assent easie, or difficult ; and as we are forward to believe what we have a mind to, so are we very backward and slow in yielding our Assent to any thing that crosseth our Inclinations. Men that allow themselves in *ungodliness and worldly lusts*, will not easily believe those Doctrines, which charge Men so strictly with all manner of Holiness, and Purity.

This is the way which the Devil hath always used to *blind the eyes of Men, that the light of the glorious Gospel of Christ might not shine into them.* And certainly the most effectual way to keep Men in Infidelity, is to debauch  
them

them in their Lives; therefore the Apostle gives this as the reason of the Infidelity of Men in the last times, *2 Thes. 2. 12. They believed not the Truth, but had pleasure in Unrighteousness.* When Men once abandon themselves to lewd and vicious practices, Infidelity becomes their Interest; because they have no other way to defend and excuse a wicked Life, but by denying the Truth which opposeth it, and finds fault with it.

That Man only stands fair for the entertainment of Truth, who is under the Dominion of no Vice, or Lust; because he hath nothing to corrupt or bribe him, to seduce him, or draw him aside in his enquiry after Truth; he hath no interest but to find the Truth, and follow it: He is enquiring after the way to Heaven, and Eternal Happiness, and he hath the indifferency of a Traveller, which is not inclined to go this way rather than another; for his concernment is to find out the right way, and to walk in it: Such an indifferency of Mind hath every good Man, who sincerely desires to *do the will of God*; he stands ready to receive Truth, when sufficient



sufficient Evidence is offered to convince him of it ; because he hath no manner of concernment that the contrary Proposition should be true. As in *Mathematicks*, a Man is ready to give his Assent to any Proposition, that is sufficiently demonstrated to him, because he hath no inclination or affection to one side of the Question more than to the other ; all his design and concernment is to find out the Truth, on which side soever it lies ; and he is like to find it, because he is so indifferent, and impartial. But if a Man be bias'd by any Lust, and addicted to any vicious Practice, he is then an interested Person, and concerned to be partial in his Judgment of Things, and is under a great temptation to Infidelity, when the Truths of God are proposed to him ; because whatever the Evidence for them be, he cannot but be unwilling to own the truth of that Doctrine, which is so contrary to his Inclination and Interest. If the Affections and Interests of Men were as deeply concerned, and as sensibly touched in the truth of *Mathematical* Propositions, as they are in the Principles of *Morality*, and *Religion*,  
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we should find, that when a Proposition stood in their way, and lay cross to their Interest, tho' it were never so clearly demonstrated, yet they would raise a dust about it, and make a thousand cavils, and fence even against the evidence of a *Demonstration*; they would palliate their Error with all the Skill and Art they could and tho' the absurdity of it were never so great and palpable, yet they would hold it fast against all Sense and Reason, and face down Mankind in the obstinate defence of it; for we have no reason to doubt, but that they who in Matters of *Religion* will believe directly contrary to what they see, would if they had the same interest and passions to sway them in the case, believe contrary to the clearest *Mathematical Demonstration*; for where there is an obstinate Resolution not to be convinc'd, all the Reason and Evidence in the World signifies nothing.

Whereas he that is biaßed by no Passion or Interest, but hath an honest Mind, and is sincerely desirous to *do the Will of God*, so far as he knows it, is likely to judge very impartially concerning

cerning any Doctrines that are proposed to him : For if there be not good Evidence that they are *from God*, he hath no reason to deceive himself, in giving credit to them ; and if there be good Evidence that they are *Divine*, he hath no interest or inclination to reject them ; for it being his great design to *do the will of God*, he is glad of all opportunities to come to the knowledge of it, that he may do it.

Thus you see how a sincere desire and endeavour to obey the Will of God, does secure Men against fatal Errors and Mistakes in Matters of Religion ; because such Persons are hereby better disposed to make a right Judgment of Divine Things, both because they have truer and surer notions of God and Religion, and are more impartial in their search and enquiry after Truth. This is the *first* Account.

*Secondly*, Another Reason why they who sincerely desire to *do the Will of God*, have a great security in discerning Truth from Error, is, because the Providence of God is more especially concerned

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cerned to preserve such Persons from dangerous Errors and Mistakes in Things which concern their Eternal Salvation. When Men are of a teachable Temper, God loves to reveal himself and his Truth to them; and such is an humble and obedient frame of Mind. *Psal. 25. 9. The meek will he guide in Judgment; the meek will he teach his way.* The proper disposition of a Scholar, is to be willing to learn; and that which in Religion we are to learn, is *what is the good and acceptable will of God*, that we may do it; for Practice is the end of Knowledge. *If you know these things (says our Blessed Lord) happy are ye if ye do them.* It is necessary to *know the will of God*; but we are *happy only in the doing of it*: and if any *Man be desirous to do the Will of God*, his Goodness is such, that he will take effectual care to secure such an one against dangerous and fatal Errors. He that hath an honest Mind, and *would do the will of God*, if he knew it, God will not suffer him to remain ignorant of it, or to be mistaken about it, in any necessary Points of Faith, or Practice.

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St. Paul is a wonderful Instance of the Goodness of God in this kind. He was undoubtedly a Man of a very honest Mind; he had entertained the Jewish Religion, as revealed by God, and been bred in it; and out of a blind reverence and belief of his Teachers, who rejected Christ and his Doctrine, he likewise opposed and persecuted them with a mighty Zeal, and an honest intention, being *verily persuaded* (as he himself tells us) *that he ought to do what he did, against the Name of Jesus of Nazareth*; he was under a great prejudice upon account of his Education, and according to the heat of his natural Temper, transported with great Passion: But *because he did what he did, ignorantly, and in unbelief*; God was pleased to *shew mercy to him*, and in a miraculous manner to convince him of the Truth of that Religion which he persecuted. He was sincerely *desirous to do the will of God*, and therefore God would rather work a Miracle for his Conversion, than suffer him to go

## The Second Sermon.

on in so fatal a Mistake concerning the Christian Religion.

And as the Providence of God doth concern it self to secure good Men from dangerous Errors and Mistakes in Matters of Religion; so by a just Judgment he gives up those who allow themselves in vicious practices, to Error, and Infidelity. And this is the meaning of that passage of the Prophet *Esa. Ch. 6. 10.* so often cited by our Saviour, and applied to the Jews, of *making the heart of that People fat, and their Ears heavy, and closing their Eyes, lest they should Understand, and be Converted.* So again, *Isa. 66. 3, 4.* God threatens the People of *Israel*, That because they were wicked and abominable in their Lives, he would abandon them, and give them over to a Spirit of Delusion; *they have chosen their own ways, and their Soul delighteth in their Abominations; I also will chuse their delusions.* God is said to chuse those things for us, which he permits us to fall into: So *Rom. 1. 28.* God is said to give over the abominable Heathen to a Reprobate Mind.



*Mind. As they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over  $\epsilon\iota\varsigma\ \alpha\delta\omicron\lambda\upsilon\mu\epsilon\nu\ \nu\acute{\omicron}\nu$ , to an Injudicious and Undiscerning Mind. When Men abandon themselves to Wickedness and Impiety, God withdraws his Grace from them; and by his secret and just Judgment they are deprived of the Faculty of discerning between Truth and Error, between Good and Evil. 2 Thes. 2. 10, 11, 12. It is said, that the Man of Sin should come with all deceiveableness of Unrighteousness in them that perish, because they received not the love of the Truth, that they might be Saved: And that for this Cause, God would send them strong delusion, that they should believe a Lye; that they all might be Damned, who believed not the Truth, but had pleasure in Unrighteousness. And it is just with God, that Men of Vicious Inclinations and Practices should be exposed to the Cheat of the grossest and vilest Impostors. God's Providence is concerned for Men of honest Minds, and sincere Intentions: But if Men take pleasure in Unrighteousness, God takes no further care of them, but delivers them up to their own hearts Lusts, to be sedu-*



*The Second Sermon.*

ced into all those Errors, into which their own *vain Imaginations*, and their *foolish hearts* are apt to lead them.

Thus have I endeavoured, as briefly as I could, to shew that an honest Mind, that *sincerely desires and endeavours to do the Will of God*, is the best security against fatal Errors and Mistakes in Matters of Religion; both because it disposeth a Man to make a true Judgment of Divine Things, and because the Providence of God is more especially concerned for the security of such Persons.

There remains an *Objection* to be answered, to which this Discourse may seem liable; but *this*, together with the *Inferences* which may be made from this Discourse, I shall refer to another opportunity.

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The Second  
**S E R M O N**  
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JOHN. VII. 17.

*If any Man will do his Will, he shall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of my self.*

**I** Made entrance into these words the last Day ; in which our Saviour declares to us, that an honest and sincere Mind, and an hearty Desire and Endeavour to do the Will of God, is the best Security and Preservative against dangerous Errors and Mistakes in Matters of Religion ; *ἐὰν τις θέλῃ ποιεῖν, if any Man desire to do his Will, he shall know of the Doctrine,*

## The Third Sermon.

*whether it be of God, or whether I speak of my self.*

Now there are (I told you) *two* great Mistakes in Religion: *To reject any thing which really is from God; and to receive and entertain any thing as from God, which is not really from him.* And therefore I proposed from this Text to shew how a sincere Desire and Endeavour to do the Will of God, is a security to Men against both these Dangers, namely, upon these *two* Accounts.

*First*, Because he who sincerely Desires and Endeavours to do the Will of God, is hereby better qualified and disposed to make a right Judgment of Spiritual and Divine Things; and that for these *two* Reasons.

I. Because such a Person hath a truer Notion of God, and Divine Things. He that resembleth God most, is like to understand him best, because he finds those Perfections in some measure in himself, which he Contemplates in the Divine Nature; and

and nothing gives a Man so sure a Notion of Things, as Practice, and Experience.

II. Because such a Person is more Impartial in his search and enquiry after Truth, and therefore more likely to find it, and to discern it from Error. That Man only stands fair for the entertainment of Truth, who is under the Power and Dominion of no Vice, or Lust; because he hath nothing to corrupt or bribe him, to seduce him, and draw him aside in his enquiry after Truth: He hath no manner of concernment that the contrary Proposition should be true, having the indifferency of a Traveller, and no other Interest, but to find out the right way to Heaven, and to walk in it. But if a Man be bias'd by any Lust, and addicted to any vicious Practice, he is then an interested Person, and concern'd to make a partial Judgment of Things, and is under a great Temptation to Infidelity, when the Truths of God are proposed to him; because whatever the Evidence for them be, he cannot but be unwilling

ling to own the Truths of those Doctrines, which are so contrary to his inclination, and interest.

*Secondly,* Another Reason why they who sincerely desire to do the Will of God, have a greater security in discerning Truth from Error, is, because the Providence of God is more especially concern'd to preserve such Persons from dangerous Errors and Mistakes, in Things which concern their Eternal Salvation. When Men are of a teachable Temper, of an humble and obedient frame of Mind, God loves to reveal himself, and his Truth to them. *Psal. 25. 9. The Meek will he guide in Judgment, and the Meek will he teach his way.* The proper disposition of a Scholar, is to be willing to Learn; and that which in Religion we are to Learn, is, *what is the good and acceptable Will of God, that we may do it;* for Practice is the end of Knowledge; *If ye know these Things* (saith our Saviour) *happy are ye if ye do them.* It is necessary to know the Will of God; but we are only happy in the doing of it; and if any Man be desirous to do the Will of  
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of God, his Goodness is such, that he will take effectual care to secure such a one against dangerous and fatal Errors. He that hath an honest Mind, and would do the Will of God, if he knew it, God will not suffer him to remain ignorant of it, or to be mistaken about it, in any necessary Point of Faith, or Practice. Thus far I have gone.

I shall now proceed to remove an *Objection*, to which this Discourse may seem liable, and then draw some *Inferences* from the whole.

After all that hath been said, some perhaps may ask, Is every good Man then secure from all Error and Mistake in Matters of Religion? This is a mighty Privilege indeed: But do not we find the contrary in Experience? That an honest Heart, and a weak Head, do often meet together?

For answer to this, I shall lay down these following *Propositions*.

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*First*, That if there were any necessity, that a good Man should be secured from all manner of Error and Mistake in Religion, this Probity of Mind, and sincere desire to do the Will of God, is the best way to do it; because such a Temper and Disposition of Mind gives a Man the best advantages to discern betwixt Truth, and Error; and God is most likely to reveal his Will to such Persons. But there is no necessity of this; because a Man may be a good Man, and go to Heaven, notwithstanding a great many Mistakes in Religion about things not necessary. For while we are in this imperfect State, *we know but in part*, and see many Things very imperfectly: But when we shall come into a more perfect State, *that which is imperfect shall be done away*; the Light of Glory shall scatter all those Mists and Clouds, which are now upon our Understandings, and hinder us from a clear Sight and Judgment of Things; we shall then see God, and other Things, as they are; and be freed from all that Ignorance, and those many Childish Mistakes

Mistakes, which we are liable to here below ; and till then, it is not necessary that we should be secured from them. Humility under a sense of our Ignorance is better for us, than Infalibility would be.

*Secondly*, This Temper and Disposition of Mind which I have been speaking of, is a certain security against Fatal Mistakes in Religion, and a final continuance in such Errors as would prove Damnable ; and this is all that this Discourse pretends to, or our Saviour hath promised in this *Text*. And considering the Goodness of God, nothing is more improbable, than that an honest Mind that seeks impartially after Truth, should miss of it ; in Things that are Fundamentally necessary to Salvation. And if we could suppose such a Man to fall into such an Error, either it would not be Fundamental to *him*, having not been perhaps proposed to him with sufficient Evidence, and would be forgiven him upon a general Repentance for all Sins and Errors known, or unknown ; or he would not be permitted  
to

to continue in it ; but the Providence of God would find out some way or other to convince him of his Error, and to bring him *to the acknowledgment of the Truth, that he might be saved.* God would rather speak to him immediately from Heaven (as he did to *St. Paul*) than suffer him to continue in such an Error, as would infallibly carry him to Hell.

*Thirdly,* There is no such depth of Judgment, and subtilty of Wit required, to discern between gross and Damnable Errors in Religion, and Necessary and Saving Truth, but that an ordinary Capacity may be able to do it. There is so plain a Line drawn between great Truth, and gross Errors, that it is visible to every Capacity; and an ordinary Understanding, that is not under a violent Prejudice, or blinded by some Vice or Fault of the Will, may easily discern it. Indeed, in Matters of lesser Moment and Concernment, and which have no such considerable and immediate Influence upon the practice of an Holy Life, the difference betwixt Truth and Error is

is not always so gross, and sensible, as to be obvious to every unprejudiced Eye. But we have all the Reason in the World to believe, that the Goodness and Justice of God is such, as to make nothing necessary to be believed by any Man, which by the help of due Instruction may not be made sufficiently plain to a common Understanding. God hath so tender a Care of good Men, who sincerely love him and his Truth, that we may reasonably presume, that he will not leave them under an unavoidable Mistake, concerning those Matters upon which their Eternal Salvation does depend. *The Judge of all the World will do right*; and then we may certainly conclude, that he will not Condemn any Man for no Fault, and make him for ever miserable, for falling into an Error, which with all his Care and Diligence he could not possibly either discern, or avoid.

Fourthly, God hath made abundant Provision for our security from Fatal and Dangerous Errors in Religion, by these *three* ways.

I.

I. By an an *Infallible Rule*, sufficiently plain in all Things necessary.

II. By sufficient means of Instruction, to help us to understand this Rule.

III. By an *Infallible Promise* of Security from Dangerous Errors and Mistakes, if with an honest Mind, and due Diligence we will apply our selves to understand this Rule, and make use of the Means of Instruction, which God hath provided for that purpose.

First, God hath given us an *Infallible Rule*, sufficiently plain in all things necessary. He hath given us the Holy Scriptures, which were given at first by Divine Inspiration, *i. e.* by Men Infallibly assisted in the Writing of them, and therefore must needs be an *Infallible Rule*; and all Scripture *Divinely Inspired, is profitable for Doctrine, for Reproof, for Correction, for Instruction in Righteousness*, as St. Paul tells us, *2 Tim. 3. 16.* speaking there of the Books of the *Old Testament*; and there  
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is the same Reason 'as to the Inspired Writings of the *New*.

Now if the Scriptures be an *Infallible Rule*, and *profitable for Doctrine and Instruction in Righteousness*, i. e. to teach us to believe, and do; it follows of necessity, that they are sufficiently plain in all Things necessary to Faith, and a good Life; otherwise they could not be *useful for Doctrine and Instruction in Righteousness*; for a Rule that is not plain to us in these Things, in which it is necessary for us to be Directed by it, is of no use to us; that is in truth, it is no Rule. For a Rule must have these two Properties; it must be *Perfect*, and it must be *Plain*. The Scriptures are a perfect Rule, because the Writers of them being Divinely Inspired, were Infallible: and they must likewise be Plain; otherwise, tho' they be never so perfect, they can be of no more use to direct our Faith and Practice, than a Sun-Dial in a dark Room is, to tell us the hour of the Day. For tho' it be never so exactly made, unless the Sun shine clearly upon it, we had as good be

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without it. A Rule that is not plain to us, what ever it may be in *it self*, is of no use at all to *us*, 'till it be made plain, and we understand it.

II. God hath likewise provided sufficient means of Instruction to help us to understand this Rule. It is not necessary that a Rule should be so plain, that we should perfectly understand it at first sight; it is sufficient, if it be so plain, that those of better Capacity and Understanding may, with due diligence and application of Mind, come to the true Knowledge of it; and those of a lower and more ordinary Capacity, by the Help and Instruction of a Teacher. *Euclid's Elements* is a Book sufficiently plain to Teach a Man *Geometry*: but yet not so plain that any Man at first Reading should understand it perfectly; but that by diligent Reading, by a due Application, and steady Attention of Mind, a Man of extraordinary Sagacity and Understanding may come to understand the *Principles* and *Demonstrations* of it, and those of a more ordinary Capacity, with

with the help of a Teacher, may come to the Knowledge of it. So when we say that the Scriptures are plain in all Things necessary to Faith, and a good Life, we do not mean that every Man at first Hearing or Reading of these Things in it, shall perfectly understand them; but by diligent Reading and Consideration, if he be of good Apprehension and Capacity, he may come to a sufficient Knowledge of them; and if he be of a meaner Capacity, and be willing to Learn, he may by the help of a Teacher, be brought to understand them without any great pains; and such Teachers God hath appointed in his Church for this very purpose, and a Succession of them to continue to the end of the World.

In a word, when we say the Scriptures are plain to all Capacities, in all Things necessary, we mean, that any Man of ordinary Capacity, by his own Diligence and Care, in Conjunction with the Helps and Advantages which God hath appointed, and in the due Use of them, may attain to the

Knowledge of every Thing necessary to his Salvation ; and that there is no Book in the World more plain, and better fitted to Teach a Man any *Art* or *Science*, than the *Bible* is, to Direct and Instruct Men in *the Way to Heaven* ; and it is every Man's fault if he be ignorant of any Thing necessary for him to believe, or do, in order to his Eternal Happiness.

III. Good Men are likewise secured from Fatal Errors in Religion, by the Infallible Promise of God, if so be that with honest Minds and due Diligence they apply themselves to the understanding of this Rule, and make use of the Means of Instruction which God hath provided for that purpose. God hath promised to *Guide and Teach the Humble and Meek* ; that is, such as are of a Submissive and Teachable Temper, desirous and diligent to be Instructed in the Truth. *Prov. 2. 2, 3, 4, 5. If thou incline thine Ear to Wisdom, and apply thine Heart to Understanding ; yea, if thou cryest after Knowledge, and liftest up thy Voice for Understanding, if thou seekest her as Silver,*

*Silver, and searchest for her, as for hid Treasures; then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord, and find the Knowledge of God.* And here in the Text our Saviour assures us, that *If any Man be desirous to do his Will, he shall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether he spake of himself; i. e. he shall be able to discern the Doctrines which are from God.*

This is the Provision which God hath made for our security from Fatal Mistakes in Religion; and this is in all Respects a better Security, and more likely to Guide and Conduct us safely to Heaven, than any *Infallible Church*, and that for these Reasons.

*First*, Because it is much more certain that God hath made this Provision which I have mentioned, than that there is an *Infallible Church* appointed and assisted by him to this Purpose. That the Scriptures are an *Infallible and Adequate Rule*, and sufficiently plain in all Things necessary, I have already proved; and I add

further, that this was the constant Judgment of the Ancient Church, and so declared by the Unanimous Consent of the Fathers of it for many Ages; and that all *Councils* in their Determination of Faith, proceeded upon this Rule, 'till the Second *Council* of *Nice*.

I have likewise proved, That God hath provided a Succession of Pastors and Teachers in his Church, to instruct us in this Rule; and that we have God's Infallible Promise for our security from dangerous Errors and Mistakes, if with an honest Mind and due Diligence we apply our selves to understand this Rule, and make use of the Means of Instruction which God hath provided for that Purpose.

But that there is *an Infallible Church* Appointed and Assisted by God, to Declare and Determine Matters of Faith, and to be an Infallible Interpreter of Scripture, is not certain, because there is no clear and express Text of Scripture to that purpose, that any Church whatsoever, much less that the *Church*  
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of Rome hath this Power, and Priviledge.

Nay, I add further, That it is Impossible, according to the Principles of the *Church of Rome*, that this should be proved from Scripture; because, according to their Principles, we cannot know either which are the true Books of Scripture, or what is the true Sense of Scripture, but from the Authority and Infallible Declaration of that Church. And if so, then the Infallibility of the Church must be first known, and proved, before we can either know the Scriptures, or the sense of them; and yet 'till we know the Scriptures, and the sense of them, nothing can be proved by them. Now to pretend to prove the Infallibility of their Church by Scripture, and at the same time to declare, that which are the true Books of Scripture, and what is the true sense of them, can only be proved by the Infallible Authority of their Church, is a plain and shameful Circle, out of which there is no way of escape; and consequently that God hath appointed *an Infallible Church* is



### The Third Sermon.

Impossible, according to their Principles, ever to be proved from Scripture, and the Thing is capable of no other Proof. For that God will Infallibly Assist any Society of Men, is not to be known, but by Divine Revelation. So that unless they can prove it by some other Revelation than that of Scripture (which they do not pretend to) the Thing is not to be proved at all. Yes, they say, by the *Notes and Marks* of the *True Church*; but what those *Marks* are, must either be known from Scripture, or some other Divine Revelation, and then the same Difficulty returns; besides that one of the most Essential *Marks* of the *true Church* must be the *profession of the true Faith*; and then it must first be known which is the *True Faith*, before we can know which is the *True Church*; and yet they say that no Man can learn the *True Faith*, but from the *True Church*; and this runs them unavoidably into another *Circle* as shameful as the other. So that which way soever they go to prove an *Infallible Church*, they are shut up in a plain *Circle*, and must either prove the *Scriptures* by the *Church*,  
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and *the Church by the Scriptures* ; or *the True Church by the True Faith*, and *the True Faith by the True Church*.

Secondly, This Provision and Security which I have mentioned, is more Humane, better Accommodated and Suited to the Nature of Man ; because it doth not suppose and need a standing and perpetual Miracle, as the other way of *an Infallible Church* doth. All Inspiration is Supernatural and Miraculous, and this Infallible Assistance which the *Church of Rome* claims to her self, must either be such as the Apostles had, which was by immediate Inspiration, or something equal to it, and alike Supernatural : but God does not work Miracles without need, or continue them when there is no occasion for them. When God delivered the *Law* to the People of *Israel*, it was accompanied with Miracles, and the Prophets which he sent to them from time to time, had an immediate Inspiration ; but their *Supream Judicature*, or their *General Council*, which they call the *Sanhedrim*, was not Infallibly assisted in the Expounding  
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ing of the *Law*, when Doubts and Difficulties arose about it; no, nor in judging of True and False Prophets; but they determined this, and all other Emergent Causes, by the standing Revelation and Rule of their *Written Law*; and that they were not Infallibly Assisted, is evident from the great Errors they fell into, in *making void the Commandments of God by their Traditions*, and in their Rejecting and Crucifying the true *Messias*, and the *Son of God*.

In like manner the Apostles and first Teachers of the Christian Religion, were immediately Inspired, and Miraculously Assisted in the Publishing of the Christian Doctrine, and for the speedy and more effectual Propagating and Planting of it in the World, in despite of the violent Prejudices that were against it, and the fierce opposition that was made to it. But when this was done, this Miraculous and Extraordinary Assistance ceased, and God left the Christian Religion to be preserved and continued by more Humane and Ordinary ways, the Doctrines

trines of it, being committed to *Writing* for a *standing Rule* of Faith and Practice in all Ages, and an *Order* of Men appointed to Instruct People in those Doctrines, with a Promise to secure both Teachers and People, that sincerely desire to know and do the Will of God, from all Fatal Errors and Mistakes about Things necessary to their Eternal Salvation; and this is a Provision more likely to be made by God, and better suited to the Nature of Man, than the perpetual and needless Miracle of an Inspired, or any otherwife *Infallible Church*.

*Thirdly*, This way is likewise more agreeable to the Nature of Religion, and the Virtue of Faith. The Design of an *Infallible Church* is to secure all that continue in the Communion of it, against all possibility of Error in Matters of Faith. The Question now is not, whether an *Infallible Church* would do this? but whether that Church which arrogates *Infallibility* to it self, does not pretend to do this? And if they could do it, it would not be agreeable to the Nature of Religion, and  
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the Virtue of Faith. For Faith, which is the Principle of all Religious Actions, would be no Virtue, if it were necessary. A true and right Belief can be no Virtue, where a Man is *Infallibly* secured against Error. There is the same Reason of Virtuous and Criminal Actions, and as there can be no Crime or Fault in doing what a Man cannot help; so neither can there be any Virtue. All Virtuous Actions are Matter of Praise and Commendation, and therefore it can be no Virtue in any Man; because it deserves no Commendation, to believe and own that the Sun shines at Noon-day, when he sees it does so. No more would it be a Virtue in any Man, and deserve Praise, to Believe aright, who is in a Church wherein he is *Infallibly* secured against all Error in Matters of Faith. Make any thing necessary, and impossible to be otherwise; and the doing of it ceases to be a Virtue. God hath so framed Religion, and the Evidence of Truth, and the Means of coming to the Knowledge of it, as to be a sufficient Security to Men of honest Minds, and teachable Tempers, against all  
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Fatal and Final Mistakes concerning Things necessary to Salvation ; but not so, that every Man that is of *such a Church*, should be *Infallibly* secured against all Errors in Matters of Faith ; and this on purpose to try the Virtue and Disposition of Men, whether they will be at the pains to search for Truth, and when it is proposed to them with sufficient Evidence, tho' not by an *Infallible* Hand, they will *receive it in the love of it, that they may be Saved.*

*Fourthly*, This is as much security against Error in Matters of Faith, as God hath provided against Sin and Vice in Matters of Practice ; and since a right Belief is only in order to a good Life, a Man would be hard put to it, to give a Wise Reason, why God should take greater Care for the *Infallible* Security of Mens Faith, than of their Obedience. The Reason pretended why God should make such *Infallible* Provision for a right Faith, is, for the better security of Mens Eternal Salvation, and Happiness. Now the Virtues of a good Life, have a more Direct



rect and Immediate influence upon *that*, than the most Orthodox Belief. *The end of the Commandments, (i. e.) of the Declaration of the Gospel, is Charity.* In the Christian Religion that which mainly avails to our Justification and Salvation is, *a Faith that worketh by Charity, and the keeping of the Commandments of God.* He that heareth these Sayings of mine, and doth them (saith our Blessed Lord) *I will liken him to a Wise Man that Built his House upon a Rock*; and again, *not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, (i. e.) makes Profession of Faith in me, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven*; but he that doth the Will of my Father which is in Heaven; and again, *if ye know these Things, happy are ye, if ye do them.* And the Apostle St. Peter Exhorts Christians to add to their Faith and Knowledge, *Virtue, and Godliness, and Brotherly Kindness, and Charity, that so an abundant entrance may be ministred to them, into the Everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.* So that the Virtues of a good Life have the greatest Influence upon our Salvation, and the main stress of Christianity is to be laid

laid there. And therefore whatever Reason can be assigned, why God should provide for the *Infallible* security of our Faith, is much stronger, why an equal Provision should be made to secure Holiness, and Obedience of Life; because without *this*, Faith cannot *Infallibly* attain its *End*, which is *the Salvation of our Souls*. But *this* it is granted God hath not done, and Experience shews it; and therefore it is unreasonable to suppose that he hath done the other. It is sufficient, that in both kinds he hath done that which is sufficient to make us capable of Happiness, if we be not wanting to our selves; the rest he hath left to the sincerity of our Endeavours; expecting that We on our part, should *work out our Salvation with fear and trembling*, and *give all Diligence to make our Calling and Election sure*. And if God hath made such Provision by the Gospel, for all that enjoy the Light and Advantage of it, that none can miscarry without their own fault; then both his Goodness and Wisdom are sufficiently acquitted, without an *Infallible Guide and Judge* in Matters of Faith, and that Irreverent way of Arguing in the *Canon Law*, might well have

*The Third Sermon.*

have been spared ; that of necessity there must be *an Infallible Judge of Controversies in Religion ; aliter Dominus non videretur fuisse discretus, otherwise God would not seem to have Ordered Matters discreetly.*

But what *Infallible Security* soever they have in the *Church of Rome*, as to Matters of Faith, they are certainly the worst provided of wholsom and safe Directions for the Consciences and Lives of Men, of any Church in the World. No Religion that I know of in the World, ever had such Lewd and Scandalous Casuists. Witness the Moral Divinity of the *Jesuits*, which hath been so exposed to the World, not only by those of *our Religion*, but by their own Writers also. Nor is this mischief only confined to *that Order* ; their Casuists in general, and even the more Ancient of them, who writ before the *Order of Jesuits* appeared in the World, have given such a Liberty, and loose, to great Immorality in several kinds, as is infinitely to the reproach of the best and purest Religion in the World. Inso-much that Sir *Tho. Moor* himself, who  
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was a great Zealot for that Religion, could not forbear to make a loud Complaint of it, and to pass this severe Censure upon the generality of their Casuists: "That their great Business seemed to "be, not to keep Men from Sin, but to "Teach them *quàm propè ad peccatum* "*liceat accedere sine peccato*; how near "to Sin they might lawfully come "without Sinning. In the mean time the Consciences of Men are like to be well directed, when instead of giving Men plain Rules for the Government of their Hearts and Lives, and clear Resolutions of the Material Doubts which frequently occur in Humane Life, they entangle them in Niceties, and endless Scrupulosities, teaching them to split Hairs in Divinity, and how with great Art and Cunning they may avoid the committing of any Sin, and yet come as near to it as is possible. This is a thing of a most dangerous Consequence to the Souls of Men; and if Men be but once encouraged to pass to the utmost Bounds of what is Lawful, the next step will be into that which is Unlawful.

*The Third Sermon.*

So that unless *Faith without Works will save Men*, notwithstanding the *Infallible Security* which they pretend to give Men of a sound and right Belief (if it were really as much as they talk of) the Salvation of Men would still be in great hazard and uncertainty, for want of better and safer Directions for a good Life, than are ordinarily to be met with in the *Casuistical Writings* of that Church ; especially if we consider that the Scriptures are lock'd up from the People in an unknown Tongue, where the surest and plainest Directions for a good Life are most plentifully to be had ; insomuch, that a Man had better want all the Volumes of *Casuistical Divinity*, that ever were written in the World, than to be without the *Bible* ; by the diligent studying of which Book alone, he may sooner learn the way to Heaven, than by all the Books in the World without it.

*Fifthly, and Lastly*, This Provision which God hath made, is, when all is done, as good a Security against Fatal Errors and Mistakes in Religion, as an *Infallible Church* could give, if there were  
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one; and it is as good a way to prevent and put an end to Controversies in Religion, so far as it is necessary that they should be prevented; and have an end put to them: And these are the *two* great Reasons why *an Infallible Judge* is so importunately demanded, and insisted upon. I shall speak to *these* distinctly, and severally; but because they will require a longer Discourse than the time will allow; I shall not enter upon them at present, but refer them to another Opportunity.

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The Third  
**S E R M O N**

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JOHN VII. 17.

*If any Man will do his Will, he shall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of my self.*

**W**HEN I made entrance into these Words, I proposed from this *Text*,

*First*, To shew that an honest and sincere Mind, and a hearty Desire and Endeavour to do the Will of God, is the greatest Security and best Preservative against dangerous Errors and Mistakes in Matters of Religion.

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In the next place, I proceeded to remove an *Objection*, to which my Discourse upon this Subject might seem liable. Some perhaps might ask, Is every good Man then secure from all Error and Mistake in Matters of Religion? This is a mighty Privilege indeed. But do we not find the contrary in experience, that an honest Heart, and a weak Head do often meet together? For Answer to this, I laid down several *Propositions*.

By the *Last* of which I shew'd, that God hath made abundant Provision for our Security from fatal and dangerous Errors in Religion, both by *the Infallible Rule* of the Holy Scripture, and by sufficient *means of Instruction* to help us to understand this Rule, and by his *Infallible Promise of assisting us*, if with honest Minds, and a due Diligence we apply our selves to the understanding of this Rule, and the use of these Means. And *this*, I told you, was in all Respects a better Security, and more likely to Conduct us safe to Heaven, than any *Infallible Church* whatsoever; and

and that for *Five* Reasons; *Four* of which I have already treated of, and now proceed to the *Fifth*, and last, *viz.*

Because this Provision which I have shewn God hath made, is both as good a security against Fatal Errors and Mistakes in Religion, as an *Infallible Church* could give, if there were *One*: And it is likewise as good a way to prevent and put an end to Controversies in Religion, so far as it is necessary they should be prevented, or have an end put to them. And these are the *two* great Reasons why an *Infallible Judge* is so importunately demanded, and insisted upon. I shall speak to these *two* Points, distinctly, and severally.

*First*, Because this is as good a security against Fatal Errors and Mistakes in Religion, as an *Infallible Church* could give if there were *one*. For an *Infallible Church*, if there were such an one upon Earth, could not *Infallibly* secure particular Christians against Errors in Faith, any other way, than by

the Definition and Declaration of those who are *Infallible* in that Church. And there are but *three* that pretend to it ; either the Pope, or a Council General, or the Pope and a General Council agreeing in the same Definitions. Not the Pope by himself, nor the General Council without the Pope ; because the Church which pretends to *Infallibility*, is not agreed, that either of these alone is *Infallible*, and therefore their Definitions can be no certain, much less *Infallible* Foundation of Faith ; no, not to that Church which pretends to *Infallibility*. So that if there be an *Infallible Oracle* in that Church, it must be the Pope and Council in Conjunction, or the Definition of a Council confirmed by the Pope. Now in that Case, either the Council was *Infallible* in its Definitions, before they had the Pope's Confirmation, or not. If the Council was *Infallible* in its Definitions, before they had the Pope's Confirmation ; then the Council alone and of its self was *Infallible* (which a great part of the Church of *Rome* deny) and then it needed not the Pope's Confirmation to make it *Infallible* ; Or else

a General Council is not *Infallible* in its Definitions, before they receive the Pope's Confirmation; and then the Pope's Confirmation cannot make it so: For that which was not *Infallibly* Defined by the Council, cannot be made *Infallible* by the Pope's Confirmation,

But there is another Difficulty yet: It is a Maxim generally receiv'd, and that even in the Roman Church, "That the Definitions of a General Council, confirmed by the Pope, are not Obligatory, unless they be receiv'd by the Universal Church. From whence these *two* great Inconveniencies will unavoidably follow.

I, That no Man is obliged to believe such Definitions, 'till he Certainly know that they are received by the Universal Church; which how he should Certainly, much less Infallibly know, I cannot understand; unless he either speak with all the Christians in the World, or the Representatives of all particular Churches return back and meet again in Council, to declare that  
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the Universal Church hath received their Definitions; which I think was never yet done.

II. It will follow, that the Definitions of a General Council, confirmed by the Pope, are not *Infallible*, 'till they be received by the Universal Church. For if they were *Infallible* without that, they would be Obligatory without it; because an *Infallible* Definition, if we know it to be so, lays an Obligation to believe it, whether it be receiv'd by the Universal Church, or not. And if such Definitions are not *Infallible* 'till they be received by the Universal Church, they cannot become *Infallible* afterwards; because if the Definitions were not *Infallible* before, they cannot be received as such by the Universal Church, nor by the meer reception of them, be made to be *Infallible* Definitions, if they were not so before.

But if we should pass over all these Difficulties, there is a greater yet behind, and that is, Supposing the Definitions of General Councils confirmed  
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by the Pope to be *Infallible*, particular Christians cannot be secured *Infallibly* from Error without the Knowledge of those Definitions. And there are but *two* ways imaginable of conveying this Knowledge to them: Either by the living voice of their particular Pastors, whom they are implicitly to believe in these Matters; but particular Pastors are *Fallible* (as they themselves grant) and therefore their words can neither be an *Infallible* Foundation of Faith, or an *Infallible* means of conveying it; and it is unreasonable, *they* say, for Men that own themselves to be *Fallible*, to require an implicit Belief to be given to them: Or else the Knowledge of the Definitions of Councils must be conveyed to particular Christians by Writing; and if so, then there will only be an *Infallible Rule*, but no living *Infallible Judge*. And if an *Infallible Rule* will serve the turn, we have the Scriptures, which we are sure are *Infallible*, and therefore at least as good as any other *Rule*. But they say, that the Definitions of Councils give us an *Infallible* Interpretation of Scripture, and therefore

*The Fourth Sermon.*

fore are of greater advantage to us. But do not the Definitions of Councils sometimes also need Explication, that we may know the certain Sense of them, without which we cannot know the Doctrines defined? Yes certainly, they need Explication as much as Scripture, if there be any difference about the meaning of them; and there have been, and still are great Differences among those of their own Church about the meaning of them. And if the Explications of General Councils need themselves to be explain'd, then there is nothing got by them, and we are but where we were before; For Differences about the meaning of the Definitions of General Councils, make as great Difficulties and Uncertainties in Faith, as the Differences about the meaning of Scripture.

Well, but the People have the living voice of their particular Pastors to explain the Definitions of Councils to them. But this does not help the Matter neither, for these *two* Reasons.

*First,*

*First*, Because particular Pastors have no Authority to explain the Definitions of General Councils. The Council of *Trent* hath by expresse Decree, reserved to the Pope, and to him only, the Power to explain the Definitions of the Council, if any difference arise about the meaning of them. So that if there be any difference about the true sense and meaning of any of the Definitions of the Council, particular Pastors have no Authority to explain them; and where there is no doubt or difference about the meaning of them, there is no occasion for the explication of them.

*Secondly*, But suppose they had Authority to explain them, this can be no *Infallible* Security to the People that they explain them right; both because particular Pastors are *fallible*; and likewise because we see in experience, that they differ in their Explications; witness the Bishop of *Condom's* *Exposition* of the Catholick Faith, and of the Definitions of the Council of *Trent*, which is in many Material Points

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Points very different from that of *Bellarmino*, and many other Famous Doctors of that Church. And which is more, witness the many differences betwixt *Ambrosius Catharinus*, and *Dominicus Afoto*, about the Definitions of that Council, in which they were both present, and heard the Debates, and themselves bore a great part in them. Now if they who were present at the framing of the Definitions of that Council, cannot agree about the meaning of them, much less can it be expected from those that were absent.

*Secondly*, This Provision which I have mentioned, is likewise as good a way to prevent and put an end to Controversies in Religion, so far as it is necessary they should be prevented, or have an end put to them, as any *Infallible Church* would be, if there were one: And this is another Reason why an *Infallible Church* is so much insisted upon, that there may be some way and means for a final decision of Controversies, which the Scriptures cannot be, because they are only

only a *dead Rule*, which can end no Controversie without a *Living Judge* ready at hand, to interpret and apply that Rule upon emergent Occasions.

It is not necessary that all Controversies in Religion should either be prevented, or decided : This the Church which pretends to be *Infallible*, cannot pretend to have done ; because there are manifold Controversies, even in the Church of *Rome* her self, concerning Matters of Religion, which still remain undecided ; and in their Commentaries upon Scripture, many Differences about the sense of several Texts, concerning which she hath not thought fit to give an *Infallible* Interpretation. And where their Popes, and several of their General Councils have thought fit to meddle with Scripture, they have applyed and interpreted Texts more improperly and absurdly, than even their private Doctors. And which is more, in Differences about Points of Faith, which are pretended on both sides to be fundamental, this Church hath not thought fit to put an end to them by her *Infallible* Decision,



cision, after two hundred years brangling about them. For instance, in that fierce and long Difference about the *Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin*, which on both sides is pretended to be an *Article of Faith*, and for which, contrary Revelations of their Canonized Saints are so frequently pretended; and yet neither Pope, nor General Council, have thought fit to exert their *Infallibility* for the decision of this Controversie. So that if their Church had this Talent of *Infallibility* ever committed to them, they have with the *slothful Servant*, laid it up in a *Napkin*; and according to our Saviour's Rule, have long since forfeited it, for not making use of it.

And whereas it is pretended, that the Scripture is but a *dead Rule*, which can end no Controversies without a *Living Judge* ready at hand, to interpret and apply that Rule upon emergent Occasions; the same Objection lies against *them*, unless a General Council, which is *their Living Judge* were always sitting. For the Definitions

tions of their Councils in Writing are liable to the same, and greater Objections, than the Written Rule of the Scriptures.

The Summ of all is this. In Differences about lesser Matters, mutual Charity and Forbearance will secure the Peace of the Church, tho' the Differences remain undecided; and in greater Matters, an *Infallible Rule* searched into with an honest Mind, and due Diligence, and with the help of good Instruction, is more likely to extinguish and put an end to such Differences, than any *Infallible Judge*, if there were one; because an humble and honest Mind is more likely to yield to Reason, than a perverse and cavilling Temper is to submit to the Sentence of an *Infallible Judge*, unless it were back'd with an *Inquisition*. The Church of *Rome* supposeth her self *Infallible*, and yet notwithstanding that, she finds that some question and deny her *Infallibility*, and then her Sentence signifies nothing. And of those who own it, many dispute the sense and meaning of her Sentence; and whether

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they deny the *Infallibility* of her Sentence, or dispute the Sense of it, in neither of these Cases will it prove effectual to the deciding of any Difference.

But after all this Provision which we pretend God hath made for honest and sincere Minds, Do we not see that Men fall into dangerous and damnable Errors, who yet cannot, without great Uncharitableness, be supposed not to be sincerely desirous to know the Truth, and to do the Will of God?

To this I shall briefly return these *Two Things*.

I. That the same Errors are not equally damnable to all. The innocent and (humanly speaking) almost invincible Prejudices of Education in some Persons, even against a Fundamental Truth; the different Capacities of Men, and the different Means of Conviction afforded to them; the greater and lesser degrees of Obstinacy, and a faulty Will in opposing the Truths proposed

propofed to them ; all thefe, and perhaps feveral other Confiderations befides, may make a great difference in the guilt of Mens Errors, and the danger of them.

II. When all is done, the Matter muft be left to God, who only knoweth the Hearts of all the Children of Men. We cannot fee into the Hearts of Men, nor know all their Circumftances, and how they may have provoked God to forfake them, and give them up to Error and Delufion, *because they would not receive the truth in the love of it, that they might be faved.* And as on the one hand God will confider all Mens Circumftances, and the Difadvantages they were under for coming to the knowledge of the Truth, and make allowance to Men for their invincible Errors, and forgive them upon a general Repentance : So on the other hand, he who fees the infincerity of Men, and that the Errors of their Underftandings did proceed from grofs Faults of their Lives, will deal with them accordingly. But if Men be honeft and fincere,

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God, who hath said, *if any Man will do his Will, he shall know of the Doctrine*, will certainly be as good as his word.

It now remains only to draw some *Inferences* from this Discourse, and they shall be these *three*.

*First*, From this *Text*, and what hath been Discourfed upon it, we may infer how slender and ill-grounded the pretence of the Church of Rome to *Infallibility* is; whether they place it in the Pope, or in a General Council, or in both. The last is the most general Opinion; and yet it is hard to understand how *Infallibility* can result from the Pope's Confirmation of a General Council, when neither the Council was *Infallible* in framing its Definitions, nor the Pope in Confirming them. If the Council were *Infallible* in framing them; then they needed no Confirmation: If they were not; then *Infallibility* is only in the Pope that confirms them, and then it is the Pope only that is *Infallible*. But no Man that reads these words of our Saviour, *if any Man will do his will, he shall*

*shall know of the Doctrine*, would ever imagine that the Bishop of Rome (whoever he shall happen to be) were secured from all fatal Errors in Matters of Faith, much less that he were Endowed with an *Infallible* Spirit, in Judging what Doctrines are from God, and what not: For it cannot be denied, but that many of their Popes have been notoriously Wicked and Vicious in their Lives: Nay *Bellarmino* himself acknowledgeth, that for a Succession of Fifty Popes together, there was not one Pious and Virtuous Man that sat in that Chair; and some of their Popes have been Condemned and Deposed for *Herésie*; and yet after all this, the Pope, and the governing part of that Church, would bear the World in hand that he is *Infallible*. But if this Saying of our Saviour be true, that if *any Man will do his will, he shall know of his Doctrine, whether it be of God*; then every honest Man that sincerely desires to do the Will of God, hath a fairer pretence to *Infallibility*, and a clearer Text for it, than is to be found in the whole Bible for the *Infallibility* of the Bishop of Rome. What would



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the Church of Rome give, that there were but as express a *Text* in Scripture for the *Infallibility* of their Popes, as this is for the security of every good Man, in his Judgment of Doctrines (which makes *Infallibility* needless)? What an unsufferable Noise, and what endless Triumphs would they make upon it, if it had been any where said in the Bible, That if any Man be Bishop of Rome, and sit in St. Peter's Chair, *he shall know of my Doctrine whether it be of God?* Had there been but such a *Text* as this, we should never have been troubled with their impertinent citation of *Texts*, and their remote and blind Inferences from *Pasce Oves*, and *super hanc Petram; Feed my Sheep;* and *upon this Rock will I build my Church;* to prove the Pope's *Infallibility*. And yet no Man of Sense or Reason ever extended the *Text* I am speaking to, so far as to attempt to prove from it the *Infallibility* of every good Man; but only his security from fatal Errors and Mistakes in Religion. The largest Promises that are made in Scripture of security from Error and Mistake about Divine Things, are made to good Men, who sincerely desire to do

do the Will of God. And if this be so, we must conclude several Popes to have been the furthest from *Infallibility* of any Men in the World. And indeed there is not a more compendious way to perswade Men that the Christian Religion is a *Fable*, than to set up a Lewd and Vicious Man for the Oracle of it.

Nay, I will go farther yet; That there are no other Promises made in Scripture, of Direction, or Assistance, or Security from Mistake, to any Church; but the same are made in as full and express Terms to every good Man that sincerely desires to know the Truth, and to practise it. Is it promis'd to the Church, or to the Pastors of it, *I will be with you always*? And hath not our Saviour promised the same to every one that is obedient to his word? *John 14. 23. If a Man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.* And does not the Apostle apply the same Promise to every good Christian, *Heb. 13. 5. I will never leave thee, nor for-*

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*f*ake thee? For where is the difference between these Expressions? *I will be with you, and I will make my abode with him? I will be with you always, and I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee?* Is it promised to the Church, that *the Spirit shall lead her into all Truth?* and is not the same Promise made to every good Man? *John 14. 21. He that hath my Commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: And he that loveth me, shall be loved of my Father; and I will love him, and will manifest my self to him; that is, God will reveal his Will to those that love him, and keep his Commandments. Hath God promised to build his Church upon a Rock? And doth not our Saviour use the same Metaphor concerning every Man that doth the Will of God? Mat. 7. 24. Whosoever heareth these Sayings of mine, and doth them, is like a Wise Man that built his House upon a Rock. So that if to be built upon a Rock signifies Infallibility, it belongs to every good Man, who sincerely practiseth what he knows, as much as to any Church.*

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When Men are enabled by God to work Miracles for the confirmation of the Doctrines which they deliver, there is great Reason to believe that they are *Infallibly* assisted in the delivery of those Doctrines: But without this, 'tis the vaineſt thing in the World, for any Perſon or Church to pretend to it; becauſe they offer no Evidence fit to ſatiſſie any Man, that they are ſo aſſiſted: And I do not hear that the Pope, among all his Priviledges, does pretend to the Power of Miracles.

*Secondly,* From hence likewise we may infer the great Reason of Error and Infidelity in the World. If any Man be an Infidel, it is not the fault of his Underſtanding, but of his Will; it is not becauſe there is not ſufficient Evidence that the Chriſtian Religion is from God, but becauſe Mens Interests and Luſts make them partial and incompetent Judges of Matters of Religion. The Evidence of the Chriſtian Religion is ſuch, as recommends it to every Man's Reason and Conſcience; ſo that (as St. *Paul* argues)

gues) if the Gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; In whom the God of this World hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the Light of the Glorious Gospel of Christ, who is the Image of God, should shine unto them, 2 Cor. 4. 3, 4.

If Men did but stand indifferent for the entertainment of Truth, and were not swayed by the interest of any Lust or Passion, I am confident that no Man that hath the Gospel fairly proposed to him, would continue an Infidel. If Men did but truly live up to the Principles of Natural Religion, they would easily be convinc'd, that the Christian Religion, which is so suitable thereto, is from God.

*Thirdly, and Lastly,* What hath been said, is a great Argument and Encouragement to Obedience, and Holiness of Life. Do we desire not to be mistaken about the Mind of God? Let us heartily endeavour to do his Will. If we would not be seduced by the Error of the Wicked; let us take heed of their Vicious Practices. The best way certainly



tainly to preserve a right Judgment in Matters of Religion, is to take great care of a good Life. God's Goodness is such, that he will not suffer any Man's Judgment to be betrayed into a Damnable Error, without some Vice and Fault of his Will. The Principles of Natural Religion are born with us, and imprinted upon our Minds, so that no Man can be ignorant of them, nor need to be mistaken about them; and as for those Revelations which God hath made of himself to the World, he hath been pleased to accompany them with so much Evidence, that an honest and sincere Mind may easily discern them from Error, and Imposture. So our Saviour hath assured us, *That if any Man desire to do his Will; he shall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God.*

On the other hand, if we see any oppose the clear Truth, or to depart from it, and to embrace gross Errors and Delusions, we may almost certainly conclude that there is some Worldly Interest or Lust at the bottom of it. So our Saviour has likewise told us, *that*  
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the Reason why Men love Darknes rather than Light, is, because their Deeds are Evil; and every one that doth Evil hateth the Light, neither cometh to the Light, lest his Deeds should be reproved. I will Conclude this whole Discourse with St. Peter's Exhortation, the 2d of Pet. 3. 17, 18. Ye therefore, Beloved, seeing ye know these Things before, beware, lest ye also being led away with the Error of the Wicked, fall from your own stedfastness. But grow in Grace, and in the Knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ: To him be Glory, both now, and for ever. Amen.

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S E R M O N

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LUKE XII. 15.

*And he said unto them, Take heed  
and beware of Covetousness; for a  
Man's Life consisteth not in the  
abundance of the things which he  
possesseth.*

**A**Mong all the irregular Appetites of Men, there is none that is more common and unreasonable, and of a more Universal bad Influence upon the Hearts and Lives of Men, than this of *Covetousness*; and therefore in speaking of this Vice, I  
shall

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shall strike at the Root of a great many others; even of Apostacy from God's Truth and Religion, of which Covetousness, and the Love of this present World, is one of the most common Causes. So that if I can contribute any thing to the Cure of this great Distemper of Mens Minds, I shall in so doing remove that, which is the Cause and Occasion of a great part of the Evils and Mischiefs which are in the World. And to this end I have pitched upon these Words of our Blessed Saviour to his Hearers; *And he said unto them, Take heed and beware of Covetousness; for a Man's Life consisteth not in the abundance of the Things which he possesseth.*

In Which Words are these *Three* Things Observable.

*First*, The *Manner* of the Caution which our Saviour here gives, *Take heed and beware*; he doubles it, to shew the great Need and Concernment of it.

*Secondly*,

*Secondly, The Matter of the Caution, or the Vice which our Saviour here warns his Hearers against, and that is Covetousness; Take heed and beware of Covetousness.*

*Thirdly, The Reason of this Caution, Because a Man's Life consisteth not in the abundance of the Things which he possesseth. Humane Life is sustain'd by a little, and therefore abundance is not necessary, either to the Support or Comfort of it. 'Tis not a great Estate and vast Possessions that make a Man happy in this World; but a Mind that is equal to his Condition, whatever it be.*

I. The *Manner* of the Caution which our Saviour here gives, *Take heed and beware.* This is a peculiar kind of Caution, and no where else, or upon any other Occasion, that I know of, used in Scripture; in which, for the greater Emphasis and weight, the words of Caution are doubled, as if the Matter were of so much Concernment, that no Caution about it could be too much;  
to

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to signifie to us both the Great Danger of this Sin of *Covetousness*, and the Great Care Men ought to use to preserve themselves from it.

*First.* The great danger of this Sin; how apt we are to fall into this Vice, and of how pernicious a Consequence it is to those in whom it reigns.

1. How apt we are to fall into this Vice: And excepting those Vices which are immediately founded in a Man's Natural Temper and Constitution, there is none that Men have a more Universal propension to, than this of *Covetousness*. For there are *two* Things which Human Nature does more especially desire to be secured against, which are *Want*, and *Contempt*: And Riches seem to be a certain Remedy against both these Evils. And because Men think they can never be sufficiently secured against these, therefore their desire of Riches grows endless and insatiable; so that unless Men be very jealous and watchful over them-

themselves, this Desire will grow upon them, and enlarge it self beyond all Bounds.

2. As Men are very apt to fall into this Vice, so is it of very pernicious consequence to those in whom it reigns. The Mischief of it is very great, and very extensive: So St. Paul tells us, 1 Tim. 6. 8, 9, 10. where he presseth Men to be contented with a small competency of the Things of this Life, because of the great Danger and Mischief of a Covetous Mind; *having Food and Raiment, let us be therewith content. But they that will be Rich* (that is, they that are bent and resolv'd upon being Rich) *fall into Temptation, and a Snare, and into many foolish and hurtful Lusts, which drown Men in Destruction and Perdition. For the love of Money is the root of all Evil.* But this I shall speak more fully to, when I come to shew the great Evil and Unreasonableness of this Vice.

Secondly, This earnest kind of Caution, as it signifies the Great Danger of this Sin of *Covetousness*, so likewise  
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the great Care that Men ought to use to preserve themselves from it; for the greater the Danger is in any kind, so much the greater Care should be used for the avoiding of it. Men are not so Solicitously concerned to defend themselves against a slight Mischiefe; but when a terrible one threatens us, we should be continually upon our guard against it, and summon all our strength and force to resist it. Thus much for the *Manner* of the Caution.

I proceed to the *second* Thing to be considered in the Text, *viz.* The *Matter* of the Caution, or the Vice which our Saviour here warns his Hearers against, and that is *Covetousness*; *Take heed and beware of Covetousness.* And in speaking of this, I shall consider these *two* Things.

1. Wherein the Nature of this Vice consists.

2. I shall Endeavour to shew the great Evil and Unreasonableness of it. I shall be large in both.

1. For the Nature of this Vice of *Covetousness.* The shortest Description that I can give of it is this; That it is *an inordinate desire and love of Riches*; but

but when this Desire and Love are *Inordinate*, is not so easie to be Determined. And therefore that we may the better understand what this Sin of *Covetousness* is, which our Saviour doth so earnestly Caution against, it will be requisite to Consider more particularly wherein the Vice and Fault of it doth consist; that whilst we are are speaking against *Covetousness*, we may not under that General Word Condemn any thing that is Commendable, or Lawful. To the end then that we may the more clearly and distinctly understand wherein the Nature of this Vice doth consist, I shall

*First*, Endeavour to shew what is not Condemned under this Name of *Covetousness*, either in Scripture, or according to right Reason: And

*Secondly*, What is Condemned by either of these as a plain Instance or Branch of this Sin.

1. What Things are not Condemned under the Name of *Covetousness*, either in Scripture, or according to

right Reason, which yet have some appearance of it; namely, these *three* Things.

1. Not a provident Care about the Things of this present Life.

2. Not a regular Industry and Diligence for the obtaining of them:  
Nor

3. Every Degree of Love and Affection to them. I mention these *Three*, because they may all seem to be Condemned by Scripture, as Parts or Degrees of this Vice, but really are not.

I. Not a provident Care about the Things of this present Life. This indeed seems to be Condemned in Scripture as a Branch of *Covetousness*, namely, in our Saviour's Sermon upon the Mount, *Mat. 6. 25. Take no thought for your Life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your Body, what ye shall put on.* Here our Saviour seems to forbid all Care, even about the Necessaries of Life, Meat, and  
Drink,

Drink, and Cloathing; much more about the Delights and Conveniencies of it. But this is not absolutely and in ordinary Cases intended by our Saviour to be Condemned, as I shall shew by and by, under the next Head.

*Secondly*, Neither is a regular Industry and Diligence for the obtaining of these Things Condemned in Scripture; tho' this also seems to be Prohibited by our Saviour in the same Chapter, *ver. 26. Behold the Fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into Barns; yet your Heavenly Father feedeth them; and ver. 28. Why take ye thought for Raiment? Consider the Lilies of the Field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin.* In which words our Saviour seems to intimate, that we ought to depend upon the Providence of God for Food and Raiment, and to use no more Industry for the obtaining of them, than *the Fowls of the Air* do, or *the Lilies of the Field*: And the same may seem to be collected out of this Chapter of *St. Luke*: For after our Saviour had in my *Text* cautioned them against Covetousness, and spoken to them a

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Parable to that purpose, of a *Rich Man who enlarged his Barns, and laid up Goods for many years*, He infers from thence, *ver. 22.* that Men should take no thought for the Things of this Life, nor use any Industry about them; and *he said unto his Disciples, therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your Life, what ye shall eat; neither for the Body, what ye shall put on.*

Now to avoid all Inconvenience from our Saviours words, I think that it is commonly said by Interpreters, that he does here only condemn a distrustful and anxious Care about the Things of this Life, and an over-sollicitous Industry and Diligence for the obtaining of them; but that he allows a prudent Care and regular Industry about these Things: And this were very well said, if it would agree with the Scope and Design of our Saviour's Discourse; but the Instances which he gives of *the Fowls of the Air*, and *the Lilies of the Field*, which are sufficiently provided for without any Care and Industry of theirs, and which he seems to set before us for a Pattern,

*behold*

*behold* (says he) *the Fowls of the Air*, I say these Instances, which he gives, seem to exclude even all regular and ordinary Care and Diligence about these Things.

What shall we say then, that our Saviour intended by his Religion to take Men off from all Labour and Industry in their Callings? This seems to be unreasonable; and indeed so it certainly were, if our Saviour had given this for a standing and ordinary Rule to all Christians; and not only so, but contrary to the Apostles Doctrine, who constantly charged Christians to labour with great diligence in their Callings, that they might be able to provide for themselves, and their Families.

But this Discourse of our Saviour's was not intended for a General and Standing Rule to all Christians; but only designed for his Disciples, to take *them* off from all Care about the Things of this Life, that they might attend upon his Person, and wholly give up themselves to that Work to which he had called them. And therefore St.



*Luke* takes notice, that after he had cautioned his Hearers in general against *Covetousness*, he applies himself particularly to his Disciples, and tells them that he would have them so far from this Vice of *Covetousness*, that they should not so much as use that ordinary Care and Industry about the Things of this Life, which is not only lawful, but necessary for Men in all ordinary Cases, *ver. 22. and he said unto his Disciples, therefore I say unto you, take no thought for your Life, what ye shall eat.* And this agrees very well with the Direction which our Saviour gave to his Disciples, when he first sent them forth to Preach, *Mat. 10. 9. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, neither coat, nor scrip;* which no Man ever understood as a general Law to all Christians, but as a particular Precept to the Apostles at that time.

And if this be our Saviour's meaning, there is then no Reason to think, that this Caution against *Covetousness* does forbid Men to use a provident Care and regular Industry about the Things of this Life.

*Thirdly,*

*Thirdly*, Nor is every Degree of Love and Affection to the Things of this World Condemned in Scripture, as any Branch, or Part of this Vice of *Covetousness*; but such a love of the Things of this World as is truly consistent with the Love of God, and a due and serious care of our Souls, is allowed both by Scripture and Reason. St. *John* indeed seems to condemn all love of the World, and of the Things of it, as utterly inconsistent with the love of God, *1 Joh. 2. 15. Love not the World, neither the Things that are in the World; if any Man love the World, the love of the Father is not in him*: But this is according to the *Hebrew* Phrase and manner of speaking, to forbid Things *Absolutely*, which are to be understood only *Comparatively*. So *Mat. 6. 19. Lay not up for your selves Treasures upon Earth; but lay up for your selves Treasures in Heaven; i. e. be not so solicitous for the good Things of this World, as for the Glory and Happiness of the next. And Luke 12. 4. Be not afraid of them that kill the Body; that is, fear them not so much as him*  
that

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*that can destroy both Body and Soul in Hell: And Luke 14. 26. If any Man come unto me, and hate not his Father and Mother, and all that he hath; that is, if he do not love me more than all these Things, he cannot be my Disciple: And John 6. 27. Labour not for the Meat which perisheth, but for that which endureth to Everlasting Life; that is, labour not so much for the one as for the other, be not so solicitous about the Things of this Life, as about the great Concernments of Eternity. So likewise Colos. 3. 2. Set your affections on things above, not on things on the Earth; i. e. set them more on Things above, than on earthly Things. So here, Love not the World, neither the Things of the World; that is, do not over-value them, do not love them so much as not to be able to part with them for Christ; for if any Man thus love the World, he does not love God as he ought. So that when the Scripture commands us not to love the World, this is to be understood Comparatively, that we should not love these Things in Comparifon of God, and the great Concernments of another World: But*  
it

it does not forbid us to love these Things in a due Degree, and with a due Subordination to those Things which are more Excellent, and of Infinitely greater Concernment to us. For nothing can be more inconsistent, than to recommend to Men Diligence in their worldly Callings and Employments (as the Scripture frequently does) and that in order to the attaining of the good Things of this Life; and yet to forbid us to love these Things at all. For if Men have no degree of love to them, the best Argument to Diligence for the obtaining of them would be taken away. Besides, that we are commanded in Scripture to be thankful to God for bestowing on us the Blessings of this Life, and we are to love him upon this account. Now can any Man love the Giver, for bestowing such Gifts upon him, which if he do as he ought, he must not love?

You see then what those Things are, which the Scripture does not Condemn as any Branch or Degree of this Vice of *Covetousness*; a provident  
Care,

Care, and a regular Industry, and such a degree of Love to the Things of this World, as is consistent with the love of God, and the care of our Souls.

2. I come now to shew what is Condemned in Scripture under the name of *Covetousness*; and by this we shall best understand wherein the Nature of this Sin doth consist. Now *Covetousness* is a word of a large Signification, and comprehends in it most of the Irregularities of Mens Minds, either in *desiring*, or *getting*, or in *possessing*, and *using* an Estate. I shall speak to each of these severally.

*First, Covetousness in the Desire of Riches*, consists in an eager and unsatiable desire after the Things of this World. This the Scripture condemns, tho' it be free from Injustice, as it seldom happens to be. This insatiable desire of Wealth God plainly condemns by his Prophet, *Isa. 5. 8. Wo unto them that joyn house to house, and lay field to field, till there be no place, that they may be placed alone in the midst of the*



*the Earth.* And this is that which our Saviour here in the *Text* seems to have a more particular respect to, when he cautions Men against the Sin of *Covetousness*, as appears both from the Reason which he gives of this Caution, and from the Parable whereby he illustrates it. From the Reason which he gives of this Caution, *Take heed and beware of Covetousness; for the Life of Man doth not consist in the abundance of the Things which he possesseth.* As if he had said, take great care to set some Bounds to your Desires after the Things of this World. For whatever Men may imagine, it is certain in Experience, that it is not the Abundance of outward Things which makes the Life of Man happy. *Wealth* and *Content* do not always dwell together; nay, so far from that, that perhaps they very seldom meet.

And the Parable likewise which follows upon this Caution, doth sufficiently shew this to be our Saviour's meaning; for he illustrates what he was speaking of, by a Rich Man, whose desire of Wealth was never satisfied, but he was continually increasing his Estate, and enlarging his Barns,



Barns, to make more room still for his Fruits, that he might *lay up Goods in store for many years.* The Parable does not so much as intimate any indirect and unjust ways of Gain, which this Man used to increase his Estate; but condemns his insatiable Desire and Thirst after more; so that even *this* alone is *Covetousness*, and a great fault; tho' it were attended with no other; because it is unreasonable, and without end.

• *Secondly*, There is *Covetousness* likewise in *getting* an Estate; and the Vice or Evil of this kind of *Covetousness* consists chiefly in these *three* Things.

1. In the use of unlawful and unjust ways to get or increase an Estate. He is a *Covetous Man*, who by the greediness of Gain is tempted to do any unjust Action, whether it be in the way of Fraud and Deceit, or of Violence and Oppression. And this perhaps is that which is most frequently in Scripture call'd *Covetousness*. And this I take to be the meaning of the Tenth Commandment, *Thou shalt not Covet*; wherein

wherein is forbidden all unjust desire of that which is another Man's, and all unjust endeavours and attempts to deprive him of it. For so our Saviour renders it, *Mark 10. 19.* where he says to the *young Man* that came to be directed by him, *what good thing he should do, that he might Inherit Eternal Life; Thou knowest the Commandments, do not commit Adultery, do not Kill, do not Steal, do not bear false witness; and then instead of the Tenth Commandment, Thou shall not Covet, or rather by way of explication of it, he adds* *μὴ ἀποστερήσῃς, defraud not*; as if he had said, in a word, be not injurious to thy Neighbour in any kind, in desiring or endeavouring to deprive him of any thing that is his. As the *Romans* in their Laws were wont to comprehend those Crimes which had no Proper Name, by the general Name of *Stellionatus*, and *dolus malus*; so here in the *Decalogue*, after God had instanced in the chief and most common sorts of Injuries which Men are guilty of towards their Neighbour, as *Murder, Adultery, Theft, Bearing of false Witness*; he summs up all

all the rest, which could not so easily be reckon'd, particulary in this short and general Prohibition, *Thou shalt not Covet*; that is, thou shalt not be injurious to thy Neighbour in any other kind; *in his Wife, or Servant, or House, or Cattle, or any thing that is his.* Covetousness, or any inordinate desire of that which is our Neighbours, being commonly the Root and Parent of all these kinds of Injuries.

And for the same Reason, St. Matthew, instead of the Tenth Commandment, puts this general Precept, *Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thy self*, as being the sense of it in other words; Mat. 19. 18, 19. *Thou shalt do no Murder, thou shalt not commit Adultery, thou shalt not Steal, thou shalt not bear false Witness, honour thy Father and thy Mother, and thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thy self.* And this Command of loving our Neighbour as our selves, our Saviour elsewhere tells us was the sum of the Duties of the Second Table; and it is the same in sense with that Precept of our Saviour, Mat. 7. 12.  
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*Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them. That is, as thou wouldest have no Man to be injurious to thee in any thing, so be not thou so to any other Man in any kind. And the Apostle, Rom. 13. 8, 9, 10. shews us upon what account this General Precept, Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thy self, is the Summ of the Second Table. He that loveth another hath fulfilled the Law: For this, Thou shalt not commit Adultery, thou shalt not Kill, thou shalt not Steal, Thou shalt not bear false Witness, Thou shalt not Covet; and if there be any other Commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this Saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy Neighbour as thy self. And then he adds in the next words, Love worketh no ill to his Neighbour; therefore Love is the fulfilling of the Law. That is, he that truly loves his Neighbour, will not be injurious to him in any kind: Therefore Love is the summ of the Law.*

The Design of all this is to shew that he that is injurious to his Neighbour in his Estate in any kind, is pro-

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perly guilty of the Sin of *Covetousness*, which is forbidden in the *Tenth Commandment*. So that all Arts of Fraud and Oppression, whereby Men endeavour to get and increase an Estate by the injury of their Neighbour, is a Branch of the Sin of *Covetousness*.

2. The Vice of *Covetousness* in *getting* Wealth, does likewise consist in an anxious and tormenting Care about obtaining the Things of this Life. The regular and due Temper of a Man's Mind about the Things of this World, is to commit our selves to the Providence of God in the use of honest and lawful Endeavours, and to refer the success of all to his good Pleasure; and whatsoever is beyond this, is a Branch of the Evil Root of *Covetousness*. We distrust the Providence of God, when after we have used our best Endeavours, and begg'd his Blessing upon them, we torment our selves about the issue and event of Things. And as this is sinful, so it is vain, and to no purpose. Diligence in our Business is the way to get an Estate,



Estate; but no Man was ever the Richer, for tormenting himself, because he was not so. The Reason why Men seek the Things of this World, and take pains to get them, is to make Life convenient and comfortable; and consequently he that torments himself about the getting of these Things, contradicts himself in his own Design, because he makes his Life *Miserable*, that he may make it *Comfortable*.

3. The Sin of *Covetousness* in getting, consists in seeking the Things of this Life, with the neglect of Things infinitely better, and which are of far greater and nearer Concernment to us. He is a *Covetous Man*, who so minds the World, as to neglect God, and his Soul; who is so busie and intent upon making provision for this Life, as to take no care of the other; so concern'd for the few days of his Pilgrimage here, as to have no consideration and regard for his Eternal Abode in another World. God allows us to provide for this Life, and considers the Necessities which



do continually press us while we are in the Body: But while we are making provision for these *Dying Bodies*, he expects that we should remember that we have *Immortal Souls*; which since they are to have an endless duration in another World, ought to be provided for with far greater Care. 'Tis an inordinate desire of Riches, when Men so lay out all their Care and Industry for the obtaining of them, as if nothing else were to be regarded, as if no Consideration at all were to be had of another World, and of that better part of our selves which is to continue and live for ever. All Desires and Endeavours after Riches, which take Men off from the business of Religion, and the Care of their Souls, which allow Men neither the leisure and opportunity, nor the heart and affection to love God, and to serve him, are to be referred to this Sin of *Covetousness*, which is here condemned by our Saviour in the *Text*.

3. There

3. There is *Covetousness* likewise in *possessing* or *using* an Estate: And this consists chiefly in these *three* Things.

*First*, When Men are fordid towards themselves, and cannot find in their hearts to use and enjoy what they possess; are continually adding to their Estate, without any design of enjoyment; and take infinite pains to raise a huge Fortune, not that they may use it, but that they may be said to have it. This is a degree of Covetousness even beyond that of the Rich Man in the Parable after the *Text*: For he it seems, after he had *enlarg'd his Barns* to his Mind, and *laid up goods for many years*, design'd at last to have *taken his ease*, and have fallen to the enjoyment of what he had gotten; *to have eat and drank, and to have been merry*; and this, tho' it proved but a foolish design in the issue, he being *cut off in that very instant* when he was come to the point of satisfaction and enjoyment;

*The Fifth Sermon.*

yet is it infinitely more reasonable, than to take great pains to get an Estate, with a full Resolution never to be the better for it.

*Secondly*, Men are *Covetous* in *keeping* an Estate, when they do not use it *Charitably*; when they cannot find in their hearts to spare any thing out of their Abundance, to the Relief of those who are in want. Tho' a Man get an Estate without *Covetousness*, and have an heart to enjoy it, yet so far he is *Covetous*, as he is *Uncharitable*. He loves Money more than he ought, who having enough to spare, chuseth rather to keep it, than to do good with it, and to use it to one of the principal Ends for which God gives an Estate.

*Thirdly*, They likewise are *Covetous*, who place their chief Trust and Happiness in Riches, who (as the Expression is, *Job 31. 24.*) *make Gold their hope, and say to the fine Gold, thou art my confidence.* And this is the Reason why *Covetousness* is

is so often in Scripture call'd *Idolatry*; because the *Covetous Man* sets up his *Riches* in the place of *God*, putting his *Trust* and *Confidence* in them, and setting his whole *Heart* upon them, loving them as he should love *God only, with all his Heart, and Soul, and Strength*: And therefore *Mammon*, which signifies *Riches*, is in Scripture represented as a *Deity*, and the *Covetous Man*, as a *Servant*, or *Worshipper of Mammon*.

So that in Scripture he is a *Covetous Man* who placeth his chief *Felicity* in a great *Fortune*, and will venture to lose any thing, rather than to part with *that*; who will quit his *Religion*, and violate his *Conscience*, and run the hazard of his *Soul*, rather than forfeit his *Estate*, or the hopes of advancing it to his *Mind*.

And this in times of *Trial* and *Difficulty*, is the great *Temptation* to which the *Covetous Man* is exposed. When a *Man* may not only save himself, but get considerable

advantage by departing from the Truth ; and in changing his Religion, may have a good Summ of Mony to boot, or which is equal to it, a good Place ; This to a *Covetous Mind* is a very strong Temptation, and almost irresistible. When Error and Delusion can bid so high, and offer so good Terms, no wonder if it gain some Profelytes among the *Covetous* and *Ambitious* part of Mankind. This the Apostle gives warning of, as a great Temptation to Rich Men in Times of Suffering, 1 Tim. 6. 9, 10. *They that will be Rich, fall into Temptation, and a Snare : for the love of Mony is the root of all Evil ; which while some have lusted after, they have erred from the Faith.* The young Man in the Gospel is a sad Instance of this kind, who chose rather to leave Christ, than to part with his great Possessions. And such a one was *Demas*, who forsook the *Apostles*, and *Christianity* it self, to cleave to this present World.

Thus I have done with the *First* Thing I proposed to speak to, the  
Nature

Nature of this Vice, which our Saviour in the *Text* Cautions Men so earnestly against; *Take heed and beware of Covetousness.* I should now proceed in the *Second* place to shew the Evil and Unreasonableness of this Vice. But that shall be the Subject of another Discourse.

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The Second  
**S E R M O N**  
 O N  
 LUKE XII. 15.

*And he said unto them, Take heed and beware of Covetousness; for a Man's Life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*

**I** Have made entrance into a Discourse upon these Words, in which I told you there are *Three* Things Observable.

*First, The Manner of the Caution which our Saviour here gives, Take heed and beware.*

*Secondly,*

*Secondly, The Matter of the Caution, or the Sin which our Saviour here warns his Hearers against, Take heed and beware of Covetousness: And*

*Thirdly, The Reason of this Caution, because a Man's Life consisteth not in the abundance of the Things which he possesseth.*

In Discourfing of the *Second* of these, viz. the *Matter* of the Caution, I proposed.

1. To Consider wherein the Nature of this Vice of *Covetousness* does consist.

2. To shew the Evil and Unreasonableness of it.

The *First* of these I have dispatched, and now go on to the *Second*, viz. To shew the great Evil and Unreasonableness of the Vice of *Covetousness*.

Now *Covetousness* will appear to be  
very

very Evil, and Unreasonable, upon these following Accounts.

I. Because it takes Men off from Religion, and the Care of their Souls.

II. Because it tempts Men to do many Things which are inconsistent with Religion, and directly contrary to it.

III. Because it is an endless and insatiable Desire.

IV. Because the Happiness of Humane Life doth not consist in Riches.

V. Because Riches do very often contribute very much to the Misery and Infelicity of Men.

*First, Covetousness* takes Men off from Religion, and the Care of their Souls. The *Covetous Man* is wholly intent upon this World; and his inordinate Desire after these Things, makes him to neglect God, and the Eternal Concernments of his Soul. He employs all his Time, and Care,  
and

*The Sixth Sermon.*

and Thoughts about these Temporal Things, and his vehement love and eager pursuit of these Things steals away his Heart from God, robs him of his Time, and of all Opportunities for his Soul, and diverts him from all serious Thoughts of another World, and the Life to come. And the Reason of this is, that which our Saviour gives, Mat. 6. 24. *No Man can serve two Masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God, and Mammon.* No Man can serve two Masters so different as God and the World are; because they will give cross Commands, and enjoin contrary Things. God he calls upon us to mind the Duties of his Worship and Service, to have a serious regard to Religion, and a diligent Care of our Souls: But the Cares of the World, and the Importunity of Business, and an eager appetite of being Rich, call us off from these Divine and Spiritual Employments, or disturb us in them. God calls upon us to be Charitable to those that are in want, to be willing to distribute;

tribute, and ready to communicate to the Necessities of our Brethren : But our Covetousness pulls us back, and hales us another way, and checks all Merciful and Charitable Inclinations in us. God calls us to Self-Denial, and Suffering for the Sake of him, and his Truth, and commands us to prefer the keeping of Faith, and a good Conscience, to all Worldly Considerations whatsoever : But the World Inspires us with other Thoughts, and whispers to us *to save our selves, not to be Righteous over much*, and rather to trust God with our Souls, than Men with our Bodies and Estates.

If we set our Hearts and Affections strongly upon any thing, they will partake of the Object which they are Conversant about ; for *where our Treasure is* (as our Lord hath told us) *there will our Hearts be also*. If a great Estate be our chief End and Design, if Riches be our Treasure, and our Happiness, our Hearts will be found *among the Stuff*. We cannot bestow our Affections freely upon *two* Objects. We cannot intently love God, and the World ;



World; for no Man can have *two* Ultimate Ends, *two* Principal Designs. Our *Riches may increase*; but if we *set our hearts upon them*, and give them the chief place in our Affections, we make them our Lord and Master. Whatever we make our Ultimate End, we give it a Sovereignty and Empire over us; we put our selves under its Dominion, and make our selves subject to all its Commands. So that if *it bid us go, we must go; come, we must come; do this, we must do it; because we are under Authority*: The World is our Master, and we are its Slaves. Now he that is under the Rule and Dominion of this Master, must withdraw his Obedience from God, and in many Cases decline Obedience to his Laws.

This Worldly Covetous Disposition was that which made those in the Parable to make so many Excuses, when they were Invited to the Supper, Luke 14. 18. *One had bought a Farm, and he could not come: Another had bought so many Yoke of Oxen, and therefore he desired to be excused.* Riches do so fill the Covetous Man's Heart,  
and

and the Cares of the World so possess his Mind, that he hath no room left in his Soul for any other Guests : *Intus existens prohibet alienum, that which is full already, can receive no more.* The Covetous Man's Heart is taken up with such Things as keep out God, and Christ, and better Things. *If any Man love the World, and the Things of it to this Degree, St. John tells us that the love of the Father is not in him.* In the Parable of the Sower, Mat. 13. 7. Our Saviour represents to us *the Cares of the World, which choak the word of God, by Thorns which sprang up among the Seed, and stifled the growth of it.* The Cares of the World will not suffer the Word of God to take deep root in our hearts, and to have any permanent effect upon them : And Ezek. 33. 31. God gives this as a Reason why the People of *Israel* would not hearken to the words of his Prophet, because their Hearts were upon the World. *They come unto thee, (says God there to the Prophet) as the People cometh, and they sit before thee as my People, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them : For with their mouth they shew much love, but*  
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*their heart goeth after their Covetousness.*

A Heart that is deeply engaged in the World, will stand out against all the Invitations, and Promises, and Threatnings of God's Word. When the Word of God invites such Persons, it is like making Love to those who have already fix'd their Hearts and Affections elsewhere; the Promises and Threatnings of the Gospel signifie but very little to such Men, because their Hearts are set upon Worldly Things, and all their Affections are bent that way; all their Hopes and Desires are Worldly, to be Rich, and abound in Wealth; and all their Fears are of Poverty and Loss. Now such a Man can only be moved with the Promises and Threatnings of Temporal Things; for no Promises have any effect upon us, but such as are of some Good, which we care for and value: Nor are any Threatnings apt to move us, but such as are of some Evil, which we dread, and are afraid of. And therefore when Eternal Life, and the Happiness of another World, are offered to a worldly-minded Man, he does not desire it, he is not at all sensible of the value of it;

it; the Man's Heart is full already of other Hopes and Desires, and *the full Soul loatheth the Honey-Comb.* Promise to such a Man the Kingdom of Heaven, and the Pleasures of God's Presence, and the Joys of Eternity, this does not signifie to such a Man any Good or Happiness that he is sensible of, or knows how to relish. And on the other hand, threaten him with the loss of God, and an Eternal Separation from that Fountain of Happiness, and with the unspeakable Anguish and Torments of a long Eternity; these Things, tho' they be terrible, yet they are at a distance, and the Covetous Man is enured to Sense, and is only to be moved with Things present and sensible; he cannot extend his Fears so far as another World, so long as he finds himself well and at ease, as to the Things of this present Life.

If we would affect such a Man, we must offer to his Consideration something that is fit to work upon him; threaten him with breaking open his House, and rifling his Coffers, and carrying away his full Bags; with que-

stioning his Title to his Estate, or starting a precedent Mortgage, or something of the like Nature: These Things indeed are dreadful and terrible to him; now you speak intelligibly to him, and he understands what you mean: Tell him of a good Bargain, or an advantageous Purchase, offer him decently a good Bribe, or give him notice of a young Heir that may be circumvented, and drawn in, then you say something to him that is worthy of his regard and attention; the Man may be tempted by such Offers and Promises as these: But Discourse to him *with the tongue of Men and Angels*, of the Excellency of Virtue and Goodness, and of the Necessity of it, to the obtaining of a Glory and Happiness that shall neither have bounds nor end; and lo! *thou art unto him as a very lovely Song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well upon an Instrument, for he hears thy words, but he will not do them*; as the Prophet expresseth it, Ezek. 33. 32. Such Discourses as these they look upon as fine talk, or a melodious sound, that vanisheth into air, but leaves no impression behind



behind it. Perhaps even these dull and stupid kind of Men are affected a little for the present with the liveliness of the Romance, and the Poetical Vein of the Preacher; but these Things *pass away like a Tale that is told*, but have no lasting effect upon them. So effectually doth *Covetousness*, and the *love of this present World*, obstruct all those Passages, through which the Consideration of Religion and Heavenly Things should enter into our Minds.

*Secondly*, As Covetousness hinders Men from Religion, and takes them off from a due Care of their Souls; so it many times tempts and engageth Men to do many Things contrary to Religion, and inconsistent with it: It is the Natural Source and Fountain of a great many Evils, and the Parent of most of the worst of Vices. He that will engage deep in the World, must use much more guard and caution than most Men do, to do it without Sin. How many Temptations is the Covetous Man exposed to in the *getting*, and in the *securing*, and in the *spending* and *enjoying* of a great Estate? It is no



easy Task to reckon them up, and much more difficult to escape or resist them; and yet each of these Temptations bring him into the danger of a great many Sins. For,

I. In the *getting* of an Estate, he is exposed to all those Vices which may seem to be serviceable to this Design. Nothing hath been the Cause of more and greater Sins in the World, than *Covetousness*, and *making haste to be Rich*. It is Solomon's Observation, Prov. 28.20: *He that maketh haste to be Rich, shall not be Innocent*. He does not say he *cannot* be Innocent, but he speaks as if there were all the probability in the World that he will not prove to be so; but being in so much *haste*, will almost unavoidably fall into a great many oversights and faults. And the *Heathen* Poet makes the very same Observation in more words,

*Inde ferè scelerum causa, nec plura  
venena*

*Miscuit, aut ferro grassatur sapius  
ullum*

*Ha-*

*Humanae mentis vitium, quam sava  
Cupido*

*Immodici Censûs: nam dives qui  
fieri vult,*

*Et cito vult fieri; Sed quæ Reverentia  
Legum,*

*Quis Metus aut Pudor est unquam  
properantis avari?*

“This, says he, is the Cause of  
“most Sins: Nor is there any Vice of  
“which the Mind of Man is capa-  
“ble, that hath been guilty of more  
“Murders and Poysonings, than a fu-  
“rious Desire of immoderate Wealth;  
“for he that *will be Rich*, will *make*  
“*haste* to be so: And what Reverence  
“of Laws, what fear or shame was  
“ever seen in any Man that was in  
“in *haste* to be Rich? And this is the  
sense of what the Apostle says con-  
cerning this Vice of *Covetousness*, this  
peremptory Resolution of being Rich,  
1 Tim. 6. 9, 10. *They that will be Rich,*  
*fall into Temptation, and a Snare, and*  
*into many foolish and hurtful Lusts,*  
*which drown Men in Destruction and*

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*Perdition. For the love of Money is the root of all Evil.* If this Vice of *Covetousness* once reign in us, if we have once fix'd our End, and set up this Resolution with our selves, that *we will be Rich*, we shall then make every thing stoop and submit to this Design. A *Covetous* Man will make his Principles and his Conscience to bend to his Resolution of being Rich, and to bow to that Interest. The eager Desire of Riches makes Men to pursue them in indirect and uncharitable ways, by Falsehood and Perjury, by undermining and over-reaching, by dissembling and flattery, by corrupting and imbasing of Commodities, by false Weights and Measures, by taking Fees with both hands, by making use of their Power and Wit to oppress and defraud their Brother, by imposing upon his Ignorance and Simplicity, or by making a Prey of his Poverty and Necessity.

*Covetousness* many times makes Men Cruel and Unjust; nay it makes them guilty of the worst sort of Cruelty and Oppression. For (as one says well)  
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the Covetous Man oppresseth his Neighbour, not for any good to himself; for he does not enjoy what he tears and rends from others; so that he is of that most hateful kind of Beasts of Prey, that kill other Creatures, not to eat them, but that they may see them lie dead by them. Lyons and Wolves kill out of hunger; but the Covetous Man, like a Serpent, or Scorpion, stings and bites others to death, not for his need, but for his pleasure and recreation. *Covetousness* is the Parent of the most monstrous Sins; because it fixeth a Man in a Resolution of getting an Estate by any means. If Falseness and Deceit, Violence and Oppression will further this End; the earnest desire of the End tempts Men to use any sort of Means whereby the End may be compassed; and tho' a Man may have some averfeness from them at first, yet that wears off by degrees, and the strong desire of the End, reconciles a Man at last to the love and liking of the Means, how wicked and unwarrantable soever. *Covetousness* tempted *Achan* to steal the accursed Thing, and *Gebazi* to lie to the

the Prophet, and *Ahab* to Oppress and Murder *Naboth*. Nay, a small Summ tempted the Covetous Mind of *Judas* to betray his Master, and his Saviour. And how do many Men every day strain their Consciences to get an Estate, and hazard their Souls for Mony; nay exchange their Souls, which are of more value than the whole World, for a very small portion of it?

II. There are likewise many other Temptations which a Covetous Man is exposed to in the *keeping* and *securing* of an Estate, when he hath got it. A Covetous and worldly-minded Man, when it comes to the Trial, is in great danger of quitting his Religion, and *making shipwrack of Faith and a good Conscience*. When his Estate comes to be in hazard, he is very apt to fall off from the Truth; 'tis an hundred to one but in these Circumstances he will chuse rather to violate his Conscience, than to forfeit his Estate. What the Devil falsely said of *Job*, is true of the Covetous Man, *he does not serve God for nought*. Upon these Terms it was, that Christ and the young Man parted;



parted; *he had great Possessions*, and it troubled him to part with them. When *Demas* was brought to the Trial, and put to it, whether he would stick to the profession of the Gospel, or his Worldly Possessions, he quitted *St. Paul*, and declared for the World, the 2d of *Tim. 4. 10. Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present World*. So far had his Covetous humour besotted him, as to make him prefer his present Interest in these Temporal Things, before those Eternal Rewards which the Gospel offered.

III. There are likewise many Temptations which Men are exposed to in the *enjoying* and *spending* of a great Estate. It is hard to have a great Estate, and not to be master'd by the love of it; not to have our Cares and Thoughts, our Hearts and Affections swallowed up by it. 'Tis no easie thing for a Man that hath Riches, not to over-value them, and love them more than he ought; not to be puffed up by them, and so place his Trust and Confidence in them. *Prov. 18. 11.*

*his trust is in his riches, which shall fail him.* The



*The Rich Man's Wealth is his strong City, and as an high Wall in his own Conceit. The Covetous Man setteth up his Riches in the place of God, and is apt to fall down before this Golden Calf, and Worship it: To say to the Gold, thou art my Hope, and to the fine Gold, thou art my Confidence: To Rejoyce, because his Wealth is great, and because his hand hath gotten much.*

Riches are a great Temptation to Irreligion and Atheism. Upon this account Agur wisely prays to God for a moderate Estate, because of the danger of both the Extreames of Riches and Poverty; because of the great and violent Temptations which Men are exposed to in both these Conditions, Prov. 30. 8, 9. *Give me neither Poverty, nor Riches; but feed me with food convenient for me. Why not Riches? Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, who is the Lord? And much more do Riches tempt Men to Pride and Insolence towards others, Prov. 18. 23. The Poor useth intreaties, but the Rich answereth roughly.* Mens Spirits are commonly blown up and bloated

bloated with their Fortunes, and their Pride, and Stomach, and Passion do usually increase in proportion to their Wealth.

And many times Riches Tempt Men to Luxury, and Intemperance, and all manner of Excess. Rich Men have a mighty Temptation to allow themselves all manner of unlawful Pleasures, because he who hath a great Estate, is furnish'd with that to which hardly any thing can be denied. And this is not inconsistent with a Covetous Humour; for there are many times Men who are Covetous in getting, for no other End and Reason, but that they may *spend it upon their Lusts*. As Covetousness sometimes starves other Vices, so sometimes it serves them, and is made subordinate to a Man's Ambition, or Lust, or some other reigning Vice. There is no such absolute inconsistency between Riches and Virtue, but that it is possible that a Man that is very Rich, may be very good. But yet if we consult Experience, I doubt it will be found a true Observation, that there  
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are but very few Rich Men, who are not insupportable, either for their *Vanity*, or their *Vices*; so that our Saviour had reason for that severe Question, *How hard is it for a Rich Man to enter into the Kingdom of God?* And well might he upon this account pronounce *the Poor, (the poor in Estate, as well as the Poor in Spirit) blessed,* as we find he does, *Luke 6. 20. Blessed be ye Poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God.* They oftner enter there, than the Rich.

*Thirdly, Covetousness* is likewise Evil and Unreasonable, because it is an endless and insatiable desire. A Covetous Mind may propose to it self some certain bounds and limits, and a Man may think that when he is arrived to such an Estate, and hath raised his Fortune to such a pitch, that he will then sit down contented and satisfied, and will seek after no more. But he deceives himself in this Matter; for when he hath attain'd to that which he proposed to himself, he will be never the nearer being satisfied. So *Solomon* tells us, *Eccles. 5. 10. He that loveth*

loveth Silver, shall not be satisfied with Silver; nor he that loveth abundance, with increase; for no degree of Wealth can satisfy a Covetous Mind. He may think so before-hand, that if he had so much, it would be enough; but when he hath attained it, he will be still reaching after more; for *Covetousness* is a Disease of the Mind, and an unnatural thirst, which is inflamed by that which should quench it. Every Desire that is Natural, is satisfied and at rest, when it hath once obtained the thing it desired. If a Man be hungry, he is satisfied when he hath eaten; or if he be thirsty, his thirst is allay'd and quench'd when he hath drank to such a proportion as Nature doth require; and if he eat and drink beyond this measure, Nature is oppress'd, and it is a burthen to him. But *Covetousness* is not the thirst of Nature, but of a Diseased Mind. It is the thirst of a Fever, or of a Dropsie; the more a Man drinks, the more he desires, and the more he is inflam'd. In like manner, the more the Covetous Man increaseth his Estate, the more

more his Desires are enlarged and extended, and he finds continually new Occasions and new Necessities; and every day as he grows Richer, he discovers new Wants; and a new Poverty to be provided against, which he did not think of before, comes into his Mind: *Et minus hæc optat, qui not habet; and he that is without these Things, covets them less than he that hath them.* So far is a Covetous Man's attaining to Riches from giving him satisfaction, that he who hath scarce any thing at all, is many times much nearer to Contentment, than he that hath got so much; nay so unreasonable is this appetite, as to desire more, even when the Man knows not how to bestow what he hath already. This Solomon observed long since, (for the Vices and Humours of Men are much the same in all Ages) *Eccles. 4. 8. There is one alone, and there is not a second; yea he hath neither Child nor Brother; yet is there no end of all his labour, neither is his eye satisfied with Riches, neither saith he for whom do I labour, and bereave my Soul of good? This is also vanity, yea it is a sore travel.* And indeed what can be greater Vanity  
and



and Folly, than to be at certain pains and labour all the days of a Man's Life, and yet to be uncertain all the while, for whom it is that he drudgeth, and taketh all these pains.

And if this be the Nature of this Vice, the more it gets, still to covet the more; then nothing can be more unreasonable, than to think to gratifie this appetite; because at this rate, the Man can never be contented, because he can never have enough; nay so far is it from that, that every new accession to his Fortune, sets his Desires one degree farther from rest and satisfaction: For a Covetous-Mind having no bounds, it is very probable that the Man's Desire will increase much faster than his Estate; and then the Richer he is, he is still the Poorer, because he is still the less contented with his Condition. However, it is impossible that the Man's Desire should ever be satisfied; for Desire being always first, if the Man's Desire of Riches advanceth and goes forward as fast as Riches follow, then it is not possible for Riches ever to overtake the Desire of them,

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no more than the hinder Wheels of a Coach can overtake those which are before : Because as they were at a distance at first setting out, so let them go never so far, or so fast, they keep the same distance still.

So that it is the vaineſt thing in the World, for a Man to deſign his own ſatisfaction by the perpetual increaſe of his Fortune, becauſe Contentment doth not ariſe from *the abundance of what a Man hath*, but it muſt ſpring from the inward frame and temper of our Minds ; and the true way to it, is not to enlarge our Eſtate, but to contract our Deſires ; and then it is poſſible that a Man's Mony and his Mind may meet ; otherwiſe the purſuit is endleſs, and the farther a Man follows Contentment, it will but flee ſo much the farther from him ; and when he hath attained the Eſtate of a Prince, and a Revenue as great as that of *France*, or the *Turkiſh* Empire, he ſhall be farther from being ſatiſfied, than when he began the World, and had no more before-hand than would juſt pay for his next Meal.

I should now have proceeded to the *Fourth* Thing; whereby the unreasonableness of *Covetousness* doth appear; because the Happiness of Humane Life doth not consist in Riches. And this is the Argument which I shall more especially insist upon, because it is that which our Saviour useth here in the *Text*, to take Men off from this Vice. *The Life of Man consisteth not in the abundance of the Things which he possesseth.* And this certainly is one of the best and most Reasonable Considerations in the World, to moderate Mens Affections towards these Things. Every Reasonable Desire propounds some End to it self. Now to what purpose should any Man desire to increase his Wealth so vastly beyond the proportion of his Necessities, and real Occasions? What Benefit and Advantage would it be to any Man, to have a hundred times more than he knows what to do withall? But I shall not Enlarge upon this Argument at present, but referr it to another Opportunity.



The Third  
**S E R M O N**  
 O N

LUKE XII. 15.

*And he said unto them, Take heed  
 and beware of Covetousness; for a  
 Man's Life consisteth not in the  
 abundance of the things which he  
 possesseth.*

**A**fter I had, in my first Discourse  
 upon this Subject, given you  
 an Account of the *Nature* of  
 the Vice of *Covetousness*, I proceeded in  
 the next place to represent the great  
 Evil and Unreasonableness of it.

M 3

*First,*

*First*, Because it takes Men off from Religion, and the Care of their Souls.

*Secondly*, Because it tempts Men to many Things which are inconsistent with Religion, and directly contrary to it.

*Thirdly*, Because it is an endless and insatiable Desire. Thus far I have gone, I proceed to the

*Fourth Thing*, whereby the unreasonableness of *Covetousness* will yet farther appear. Namely, because the Happiness of Humane Life doth not consist in Riches, and Abundance. And this I shall insist upon somewhat the more largely, because it is the Argument which our Saviour makes use of here in the *Text*, to take Men off from this Sin. *The Life of Man consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth: Therefore take heed and beware of Covetousness.* And this certainly is one of the best and most reasonable Considerations in the World,

World, to moderate our Affections towards these Things. For every reasonable Desire propounds some End to it self. Now to what purpose should any Man desire to increase his Wealth so vastly, and beyond the proportion of his Necessities and real Occasions? What Benefit and Advantage can it be to any Man, to have an hundred, or perhaps a thousand times more than he knows what to do withall?

And as for the other World, no Man ever pretended that the heaping up Riches here, would be useful to him there; *Riches will not deliver him in the day of wrath.* No Man was ever so senseless, as to imagine that he could take his Estate along with him into the other World; or if he could, that Heaven was to be bought with Mony; or that a great Estate, or a great many Lordships would recommend him to the favour of God. 'Tis true indeed, a Man may so use Riches in this World, as thereby to promote and further his happiness in the next. But then it is likewise as true, that a Man may so demean himself in a Poor and



Low Condition, as thereby to render himself as acceptable to God, and capable of as great a Reward, as the Richest Man can do. The Poor Woman's *two Mites* chearfully given to Pious and Charitable Uses, will go as far in the other World, and find as great a Reward there, as the Rich Man's *thousands of Gold and Silver*. And a Man may be as truly Generous and Charitable of a little, as out of the greatest Fortune. Besides that the Poor Man's Contentedness in a mean Condition, is more admirable in it self, and more valuable with God, than for a Rich Man to be so.

So that the great Use of Riches respects this World, and the best Use of them is in ways of Charity; and the Poor Man's Charity, tho' it cannot be of so great an extent in the effects of it, yet in the degree of its Virtue and Merit it may be equal to it.

Now the *two* great Designs of Men, in regard to this World, are these.

1. To

1. To maintain and support our Lives as long as we can.

2. To make our Lives as truly Happy and Comfortable as we can.

To the *First* of these Ends, namely the support of our Lives, a very little will suffice, and 'tis not much that is necessary to the *other*, to render our Lives as truly Comfortable as this World can make them; so that a vast Estate is not necessary to either of these Ends; for a Man may *live* by having what is necessary, and may *live comfortably* by having that which is convenient.

No Man lives the longer by having abundance; it is many times an occasion of shortning a Man's Life, by Ministering to Excess and Intemperance; but seldom of prolonging it. And setting aside the vain fancy and conceit of Men, no Man lives the more happily, for having more than he hath real use and occasion for.

These

These *two* Heads I shall at present speak to, to make out the full force of this Reason, which our Saviour here useth; namely, *That a Man's Life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*

I. That Riches do not contribute to the support of our Lives; nor,

II. To the Happiness and Comfort of them. That is, they are not necessary to either of these Ends. For by *Riches* I mean *whatever is beyond a sufficient competency of those things, which are requisite to the real Uses and Occasions of Humane Life.*

*First*, Riches and Abundance do not contribute to the support of our Lives. And this our Saviour very well represents to us in the Parable immediately after the Text, of the *Rich Man*, who was continually encreasing his Estate, so that *he had goods laid up for many years*; but he lived not one jot the longer, for being provided of the Conveniencies of Life for so long a time

time before-hand ; for whilst he was blessing himself, as if he had secured his Happiness sufficiently for this World, he was uncertain of his continuance in it ; God having decreed to take him out of this World, at that very time when he had determin'd to enter upon the Enjoyment of those Things, which he had been so long laying up. God says to him, *thou Fool, this night shall thy Soul be required of thee ; and then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided ?* That is, what good then will all these Things do thee, when thou hast no farther use and occasion for them ? So that if he had been the poorest Man in the World, and had not been provided for the next Meal, he might have lived as long as he did with all his stores. You see then that in this sense, *a Man's Life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.* For notwithstanding all his great Barns, and the abundance of Fruits he had stowed in them, he did not live one jot the longer, than the poorest Man might have done.

Secondly,

*Secondly*, Nor do Riches contribute to the Happiness and Comfort of our Lives. Happiness is not to be bought and purchas'd together with great Lordships; it depends upon a great many Causes, among which, a competency of the Things of this World is one; but Riches and Abundance is none of them. The Happiness of this World consists in these *two* Things,

1. In the Enjoyment of Good.  
And,

2. In a state of freedom from Evil.

Now Riches do not necessarily make a Man Happy in either of these Respects.

*First*, For the Enjoyment of Good, A competent Estate suitable to the Condition and Station in which God hath set us in this World, will give a Man whatever Nature and Reason can desire; and abundance cannot make a Man Happier. If a Man had an hundred times more than he needed, he  
could

could but enjoy it according to the capacity of a Man; for if he consulted his own Happiness, and would truly enjoy what he hath, he must eat and drink within the bounds of Temperance and Health, and must wear no more Cloaths than are for his Convenience. 'Tis true, he hath wherewithal to put on a new Suit every day; which is to be uneasie all the days of his Life; and may drink, if he please, every time out of a new Cup; which would be a vain expence, and a great trouble to his Servants, without any manner of convenience to himself.

But then if Riches fall into the *Covetous* Man's hands, they can be no Happiness to him, because he hath no heart to enjoy them. He hath indeed the Estate of a Rich Man, but he wants the Comfort of it, because he hath the Mind of a Poor Man; and Enjoyment is all the Felicity that is in a great Fortune; what we enjoy is ours, but what we lay up, is from that time not ours, but some bodies else.

He



He that heaps up Riches, and enjoys them not, is Rich only for his Heir, but a Beggar for himself.

We are apt to pity Poor Men, and too apt to despise them; but surely no Man's Condition is more to be deplored than his, who starves himself in the midst of Plenty, and being surrounded with the Blessings of God, turns them into the greatest Curse; for it is a much greater Curse, not to use an Estate when one has it, than not to have it. It is like a plentiful Table without an Appetite.

But it may be it is a great Happiness to have a great Estate, tho' a Man never use it; the pleasure of seeing it, and telling it over, may be like the removing of Billets, which may warm a Man as much as if he had spent and consumed them. But *this* is *Real*, and the other only *Imaginary*. I doubt not, many Covetous Men take a great deal of pleasure in ruminating upon their Wealth, and in re-counting what they have; but they have a great deal of tormenting care and fear about it;  
and

and if they had not, it is very hard to understand where the reasonable Pleasure and Happiness lies of having Things to no end. It is at the best, like that of some foolish Birds, which they say take pleasure in stealing Money, that they may hide it; as if it were worth the while, for Men to take pains to dig Silver out of the Earth, for no other purpose, but to melt it down, and stamp it, and bury it there again.

But many Necessities may happen, which we cannot fore-see, and it is good to provide against them. There is nothing so bad, but something may be said in excuse of it; and I do not deny, but that a provident Care against the common Accidents of Humane Life is very commendable; but it is unreasonable to think of providing against all possibilities, which it is impossible either to fore-see, or prevent. 'Tis very possible, that after a Man hath gotten the greatest Estate imaginable, he may lose it all by some Fatal Accident; and then to what purpose was all this provision made, when

when that which was so long a time a getting, and laying up, is lost at once?

Besides, that it is not easie to conceive what necessity can happen to a *Covetous* Man, to give him an occasion of using his Estate; he cannot find in his heart to bestow it upon himself in such Things as are convenient, nay almost necessary for the support of his Life; for no Man can feed his Servants more penuriously than he does himself; all the Religion he values himself upon, is a strict observance of the *Lessian* Diet, which he recommends to those few that can deny themselves to Dine with him, in hopes to make better Meals upon his Estate when he is gone. And if he be so penurious to himself, the necessities of others are not like to move him to be liberal. I can but imagine one Occasion that could tempt such a Man to lay out what he hath; namely, when one part of his Estate is in danger, to spend the other to secure it. And yet even in that Case, if his Cause were not very clear and good, he

he would go nigh to lose it, using it as he does himself ; that is, by starving it. And if this be all, then a Man had as good be without an Estate, and save himself the trouble either of getting it, or securing it; for if it were all gone, he might live as well as he does, and that with half the Care and Pains.

*Secondly,* The Happiness of this World consists in a state of freedom from Evil. Now the great Evils that Men are liable to in this World, are such as are incident to them either in the course of their Lives, or at the time of their Death ; and Riches do not contribute to Mens Happiness, by freeing them from either of these. I shall speak to these severally.

1. Not from the Evils which are incident to Men in the course of their Lives. These are of *two* kinds, *inward*, or *outward*.

1. *Inward* Evils, by which I mean those of the Mind ; and our greatest troubles are from within, from the  
N anxiety

anxiety of our Minds, and the guilt of our Consciences, from the vicious inclinations of our Wills, and the irregularity and disorders of our Passions. Now Riches were an admirable thing indeed, and worth our Coveting, if they would help to Cure these Distempers of our Minds; but they are the least fitted for such a purpose of any thing in the World: For not he that hath the greatest Estate, but he that hath the fewest and most reasonable Desires, and the best govern'd Passions, and the most Virtuous Inclinations, is the Happiest Man, and dwells nearest to satisfaction. *Nemo malus sælix, No bad Man can be Happy,* tho' he were possessed of the whole World; because he hath that within him, which frets and discontents him, which galls his Spirit, and keeps his Mind restless and uneasie; and he that does not enjoy *himself*, can enjoy nothing else.

Did but Men know how much Happiness hath been enjoyed by many a Pious and Virtuous Man in a mean Fortune, how quiet and easie their  
Minds

Minds have been, how much fuller of Joy and Pleasure, than the Heart of any Covetous Worldling ever was in his most prosperous Estate, and when *his Corn, and Wine, and Oyl abounded*; did we (I say) but know this, we should not envy the Men of mighty Fortunes. *Nam neque divitibus contingunt gaudia solis.* Rich Men are not the only happy People in the World. If they be not Good as well as Rich, Happiness is a greater stranger to their Dwellings, than to the Cottages of Poorer Men.

Now Riches are so far from helping to make Men good, that they are one of the greatest Temptations to them in the World to be otherwise; which is the Reason, why our Saviour says, *it is so very hard for a Rich Man to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven*; because considering the powerful and almost irresistible temptations of a great Estate, and the impotency and weakness of humane Nature to govern it self in a plentiful Fortune, it is very hard for a Rich Man to be so good as he ought, it requires a great force and firmness of Resolution, a very



solid and vigorous constitution of Mind, to bear a great Fortune, and not to be corrupted by it; and a Man hath never more Reason to implore God's gracious help and assistance, and to consult his own best and coolest thoughts, to know what he ought to do, and how he ought to demean himself, than when the outward Blessings of this Life flow in amain upon him; *felicitate corrumpimur, nothing sooner debaucheth Men than Prosperity*; and he is a very happy Man, whom Wealth and a good Fortune do not make licentious and dissolute; because these tempt Men with the power and opportunity to do all the ill that their wicked Hearts can design, or desire.

The Temptation of Riches, and the Power that goes along with them, is so forcible and prevalent, that the Devil, who is a sagacious Spirit, and hath great and long experience in this kind, when he was making the Experiment whether Christ was a meer Man, or the Son of God, reserved this for his last Temptation; resolving if that would not do, to try him no farther.

ther. After he had assaulted him in several kinds, he represents to him at last that which was sufficient to have surfeited two of the most insatiable Desires of Humane Nature, *Ambition*, and *Covetousness*, even *all the Kingdoms of the World, and the glory of them, in a moment, or point of time*; he brings all the Rays of this Glory to one point, that the Temptation might kindle and take hold the sooner; and says to him, *all this will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me.* He supposed with great probability, that if he were but a meer Man, the strongest and most resolved Mind would bend and yield to so dazling a Temptation as this; but when he saw that this Temptation was rejected, he found himself baffled, and gave him over; since this did not move him, he concluded now that he was *the Son of God indeed*, and that it was in vain to tempt him any farther.

From all this it appears, that Riches are so far from making Men Virtuous, that nothing is more dangerous to Virtue, than a full Condition; if Men

have not a great degree of Grace, as well as Discretion to manage it. *Solomon* tells us, that *the prosperity of Fools destroyeth them.*

And yet how do most of us Court this Temptation, and are forward to thrust and venture our selves upon it? There are a great many other Things, in which most Men make a right Judgment of themselves, and will readily acknowledge that they are altogether unfit for them. Every Man will not take upon him to be a Physician, or a Lawyer, to prescribe Medicines in dangerous Cases, and to give Counsel to Men in knotty and difficult Points about their Estates; but every Man thinks himself fit enough to be Rich, and sufficiently qualified to manage a great Estate, if he can but get it; when perhaps there are few things in the World, which Men are more insufficient for, than to weild and govern a great Fortune, nor wherein there is greater danger and miscarriage. It is not every bodies Talent, to be Wealthy, and Wise; Rich, and Innocent.

I. As

2. As for the *outward* Evils of this Life, such as Want, and Contempt, Bodily Pains and Diseases, Unhappiness in Friends and Relations, a great Estate is by no means a sufficient Security or Remedy to a *Covetous* Man against these.

1. As for want. And surely one would think, that if Riches were good for any thing, they are a very proper Remedy against this Evil, and a most certain and Infallible Cure of it; but Experience tells us quite otherwise. *Socrates* was wont to say, that "To want nothing is the priviledge of the Deity, and proper to God alone; but to stand in need of as few things as may be, is the Priviledge of a Wise and Good Man, and a state of Happiness, next to that of God himself; because he that hath the fewest Wants, is the most easily supplied, and is next to him that is self-sufficient. Now a Man of moderate Desires hath infinitely fewer wants than a *Covetous* Man; and because his Desires are moderate, a moderate Estate will satisfie

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them;

them: but the Wants of a *Covetous* Mind are never to be supplied, because it hath ordered the Matter so cunningly, as to want even that which it hath; such a Man does not get Riches to supply his Wants, but is content to Want, that he may be Rich; insomuch that he hath not the heart to use his Estate for the supply of his real necessities. How many do almost starve themselves in the midst of Plenty and Abundance? There is no greater sign of Poverty, than to be deeply in debt: now the *Covetous* Man lives and dies in debt to himself. Some Men have been so shamefully penurious and stingy to themselves, as even *to die, to save Charges*, which yet perhaps is the most generous thing they ever did in their whole Lives, in respect to the World; because by this means some body may come to the enjoyment of their Estates, and that great Dunghil which they have been so long in raking together, may by this means come to be spread abroad for the Publick Benefit.

So that if a *Covetous* Man were possess'd of the Wealth of both the *Indies*, all this would not free him from want. A Poor Man's wants may be satisfied, when he hath obtained what he wants: but the *Covetous* Man labours of an incurable want; because he wants that which he hath, as well as that which he hath not.

2. As for Contempt, Riches will not secure a *Covetous* Man against this neither; nay so far is it from that, that he is commonly the more ridiculous and despised for living Poor in the midst of Abundance, than if he were really so. Did I say *really* so? He is the most *really* Poor of all other Men. For as one says well, *the Rich Poor Man is emphatically Poor.*

3. Neither will Riches free Men from bodily illness and pain. The Rich are liable to as many Diseases, and as sharp Pains, as the Poor, and they have commonly less patience to bear them than the Poor; because they have not been inured to other sorts of Evils.  
They



They that have been accustomed to Labour, are generally best fitted to bear Pain; the Rich are commonly more tender and delicate, and have a quicker sense of Pain, more Matter, and greater quantity of Humors to feed a Disease, and to enflame it to a greater heighth.

I must not here forget that there is a sort of Rich Men, I mean the penurious Misers, who starve themselves more than the Poor, and fare many times more hardly; and for this Reason, tho' they be not in danger of the Diseases that come from Intemperance, and a plentiful Table; yet they are liable to the Diseases which proceed from starving and emptiness; which the Physicians say are more dangerous than the other: So that neither the Prodigal, nor the Niggardly Rich Man is secured from Bodily Pains and Diseases by a great Estate.

4. Neither will Riches secure a Man from being unhappy in his Friends and Relations. A great Estate will not make a Man's Children either more  
Dutiful

Dutiful or Wise, than the Children of meaner Persons; and if they be not so, his Estate cannot be so great an Happiness to him, as *they* may prove an Affliction. *Solomon* tells us, that the very fear and apprehension of this did very much imbitter the fruit of all his Labour; and he seems to speak it sensibly, and very probably with a melancholy reflection upon his Son Rehoboam, *Eccles. 2. 18, 19. Yea I hated all my labour which I had taken under the Sun, because I should leave it unto the Man that shall be after me; and who knows whether he shall be a Wise Man, or a Fool? Yet shall he have rule over all my labour, wherein I have labour'd, and wherein I have shew'd my self Wise under the Sun.* Who knows whether he shall be a Wise Man, or a Fool? He seems to speak doubtfully: but he had a very shrewd guess what kind of Man his Son would make; for he speaks more despondingly in the next words, (*ver. 20, 21.*) *therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the Sun; (that is, when I thought seriously of it, I began to think that all the pains I had taken to get an*

Estate,

Estate, would be but to little purpose;) *for there is a Man (saith he) whose labour is in Wisdom, and in Knowledge, and in Equity (that is, who by wise and honest means hath rais'd a great Estate) yet to a Man that hath not laboured therein (that is, to a Man who is endowed with none of these qualities) shall he leave it for his Portion; this also is Vanity, and a great Evil.*

And as for Friends, tho' the Rich Man have many that will call themselves so, yet he had almost as good have none; for he can hardly ever know whether they be so or not, unless he chance to fall into Poverty, and then indeed the change of his Condition may give him that advantage and opportunity, which otherwise he is never like to have, of discerning between his Friends and his Flatterers. Thus you see that Riches are no security against the most considerable Evils which attend us in the course of our Lives.

*Secondly,* When we come to die, nothing will minister less Comfort to  
us

us at that time, than a great Estate. It is then a very small pleasure to a Man, to reflect how much he hath gotten in the World, when he sees that he must leave it; nay, like the Young Man in the Gospel, *he goes away* so much the more *sorrowful, because he had great Possessions*. All the Things of this World seem very inconsiderable to a Man, when he approaches to the Confines of the other: For when he sees that he must leave this World, then he would fain make a Virtue of Necessity, and begins to change his apprehensions of these Things, and to have very slight and mean thoughts of them, when he is convinc'd he can enjoy them no longer. What the Philosopher was wont to say of the Pleasures of this World, is as true of Riches, and all the other Enjoyments of it; that "if they did  
"but put on the same countenance,  
"and look with the same face, when  
"they come to us, that they will do,  
"when they turn from us, and take  
"their leave of us, we should hardly  
"entertain them.

Now if a Man have placed his chief Happiness in this World, as the Cove-

tons

*tous* Man does in his Riches, his great trouble when he comes to die, will be, that he must leave them. Nothing could be more severely said to the *Covetous* Man, than that which God says to the *Rich Man* in the Parable; *Thou Fool, this night shall thy Soul be required of thee, and then whose shall these things be?* For of all things in the World such Men cannot endure to think of parting with these things, or that what they have got with such great Care and Labour, should come to the Possession of another.

And therefore when we are so hot and eager in the pursuit of these things, we should do well to consider, *how they will appear to us in a dying hour.* And this Consideration well imprinted upon our Minds, would make us very careful, to treasure up other kind of Comforts to our selves against such a time, and to Labour after those Things which we shall never grow out of conceit withall, but shall value them to the last, and then most of all, when we come to die, and leave this World. For as a Poet of our own says Excellently,

'Tis

*'Tis not that which first we love :  
But what dying we approve.*

Thus I have done with the *Fourth* Thing, whereby the Evil and Unreasonableness of *Covetousness* doth appear; namely, that the Happiness of Humane Life doth not consist in a great Estate; *the Life of Man doth not consist in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.* The great Ends of *Religion*, and *Covetousness*, are very different. The great End which *Religion* proposeth to it self, is *Happiness*: but the great End which *Covetousness* proposeth, is *Riches*; which are neither a necessary nor a probable means of *Happiness*. I should now have proceeded to the *Fifth* and *last* Particular; namely, That Riches are so far from being the Happiness of Humane Life, that they usually contribute very much to our Misery, and Sorrow; as will appear if we consider these *Four* Things.

*First*, The Labour and Care which *Covetous* Men are at in the Getting of a great Estate.

*Secondly*,



*Secondly*, The Anxiety of keeping it, together with the Fears of losing it.

*Thirdly*, The Trouble and Vexation of having lost it ; and,

*Fourthly*, The dreadful and heavy Account which every Man must give of a great Estate. But these Particulars, together with the *Application* of this whole Discourse, I shall refer to another Opportunity.

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T H E

The Fourth  
**S E R M O N**  
 O N

LUKE XII. 15.

*And he said unto them, Take heed  
 and beware of Covetousness; for a  
 Man's Life consisteth not in the  
 abundance of the things which he  
 possesseth.*

**I**N my two last Discourses on this  
 Subject, I have represented the  
 Evil and Unreasonableness of the  
 Vice of *Covetousness* in *Four* Particulars.  
 I proceed now to the *Fifth* and last  
 Particular, whereby I told you the  
 Evil and Unreasonableness of it would  
 appear; *viz.*

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That

That Riches are so far from being the Happiness of Humane Life, that they usually contribute very much to our misery and sorrow; as will evidently appear, if we consider these *Four Things*.

*First*, The Labour and Care which the *Covetous* Man is at in the getting of a great Estate.

*Secondly*, The Anxiety of keeping it, together with the Fears of losing it.

*Thirdly*, The Trouble and Vexation of having lost it.

*Fourthly*, The heavy and dreadful Account which every Man must give of a great Estate.

*First*, The Labour and Care which the *Covetous* Man hath in getting a great Estate. He that will be Rich must sweat for it, and refuse no pains and trouble; he must *rise up early, and lie down late, and eat the bread of Carefulness.*

*fulness.* A Slave that Diggs in the Mines, or Rows in the Gallies, is not a greater Drudge, than some *Covetous* Worldlings are ; only with this difference, that the *Covetous* Man thinks that he Labours and takes all these Pains for himself ; whereas the Slave understands the matter more truly, and thinks that he does it for another.

But besides the Pains he takes, he is full of Care and Anxiety. How is he, through the greedy desire of *having*, rack'd between the hopes of getting, and the fear of missing what he seeks ? The Apostle observes what tormenting Cares accompany this Vice, 1 *Tim.* 6. 10. *The love of Money* (saith he) *is the root of all evil* ; not only of the Evil of Sin, but of the Evil likewise of Trouble and Disquiet. For it follows, *which while some coveted after, they have pierced themselves through with many sorrows* : Variety of Troubles attend them that *will be Rich*.

Secondly, If we consider the Anxiety of keeping what they have got, together with the Fear of losing it again, this is another great part of a *Covetous* Man's infelicity. The Rich Man here in the Parable after the *Text*, when he saw his Estate coming upon him so fast, cries out, *what shall I do?* Poor Man! who would not pity his Condition, to see him put to this difficulty and distress, and to hear him make as heavy a moan as the Poorest Man could do! Now that he hath a plentiful Harvest, and his Crop hath answered, if it were possible, his *Covetous* Desire, he is in a great deal of perplexity, and almost at his wits end how to dispose of it; he was horribly afraid lest any of it should be lost for want of a secure place to store it up in. *What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my Fruits?* Where was the difficulty of this? why, he was loth to lose his Fruits, and he was loth to lay out Mony to secure them. But upon farther Consideration, he resolves of *the two Evils to chuse the least*; and he said, *this will I do, I will pull down my Barns, and build greater,*

greater, and there will I bestow all my Fruits, and my Goods. But why could he not let the Barns he had stand, and build more? No, that he did not think so well, he loved to see all his good Things at one view, and what a goodly show they would make together. Besides that it is the humour of Covetousness, when it breaks out into Expence, to over-do; the Miser's Buildings are like his Feasts, always Extravagant. The Covetous Man (as to the business of expence) is like a Coward as to fighting, he declines it as long as he can; but when he is push'd to the last necessity, he grows desperate, and lays about him.

*Tantis parta malis, curâ majore metuque  
Servantur, misera est magni custodia census.*

Riches which are got with so much trouble, are not kept without greater fear and care. A Covetous Man is in nothing more miserable, than in the Anxiety and Care of disposing and securing what  
O 3 he



*he hath got.* When a Man's Desires are endless, his Cares and Fears will be so too.

*Thirdly,* As great an Evil as any of the former, is the vexation of having lost these Things. If by any Accident the Man happens to be deprived of them, then he takes on heavily, hangs down his head and mourns, *as a Man would do for his first-born*; and is ready to cry out with *Micah, they have taken away my Gods, and what have I more?* Upon every little loss the Covetous Man is undone, tho' he have a hundred times more left than he knows what to do withal. So deeply are the hearts of Earthly-Minded Men many times pierced with Earthly Losses, as with *Rachel to refuse to be comforted.* Nay St. Paul observes, that *the sorrow of the world sometimes worketh death,* 1 Cor. 7. 10.

*Fourthly,* But the saddest Consideration of all is, that heavy and dreadful Account that must one day be given, both of the getting and using of a great Estate. They that have got  
an

an Estate by Fraud and Falsehood, or by Oppression and grinding the face of the Poor, may read their Doom at large, James 5. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Go to now ye Rich Men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you, your Riches are corrupted, and your garments moth-eaten, your Gold and Silver is canker'd, and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire: ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Behold the hire of the labourers which have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, cryeth, and the cry of them which have reaped, are entred into the ears of the Lord of Sabbath; ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton, ye have nourished your hearts as in a day of slaughter.

And we must be accountable likewise for the using of our Estates. God gives them to us in trust, and the greater they are, the more we are to account for; so much as we need is ours, but beyond what will support us, and be a convenient provision for our Families, in the rank God hath placed

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them;

them, all that is given to us, that we may give it to *others*; and indeed it is not *ours*; we are the *Proprietors* of it in respect of Men, but in respect of God we are but *Trustees*, and *Stewards*, and God will require an account of us how we have disposed of it.

And can there be a more reigning madness among Men, than to take care only to increase their Account more and more, by receiving much; whereas our great Care and Concernment should be to clear our Account, by laying out what we receive, according to the trust reposed in us. How much we shall receive of the Things of this World, is in the Care and Will of our Master; but our Care and Fidelity is seen in laying it out as we ought. Among *Men* (says one) it is well enough, if a Steward can give an Account of so much laid out, and so much in Cash, and upon this he shall have his Discharge: but we cannot this way clear our Account with *God*; for it is not offering him *his own again* that will satisfy him, as we may learn from the Parable of the *Talents*.  
So

So that upon the whole matter, we should be so far from envying the Rich, that we should rather envy the Safety and Happiness of those who are not intrusted with such dangerous Blessings, and who are free from the Temptations of a plentiful Fortune, and the Curse of a *Covetous* Mind, and from the heavy Account of a great Estate.

I come now, in the last place, to make some *Application* of this Discourse to our selves.

1. Let our Saviour's *Caution* take place with us, let these words of his sink into our Minds, *take heed and beware of Covetousness*. Our Saviour I told you doubles the *Caution*, that we may double our *Care*. It is a Sin very apt to steal upon us, and sliely to insinuate it self into us, under the specious pretence of Industry in our Callings, and a provident Care of our Families: But however it may be coloured over, it is a great Evil, dangerous to our selves, and mischievous to the World. Now to kill this Vice  
in

*The Eighth Sermon.*

in us, besides the Considerations before-mentioned taken from the *Evil* and *Unreasonableness* of it, I will urge these *three* more.

1. That the Things of this World are uncertain.

2. That our Lives are as uncertain as these Things : And,

3. That there is another Life after this.

1. The uncertainty of the Things of this World. This should very much cool our Affections toward them, that after all our Care and Diligence for the obtaining of them, we are not sure to enjoy them, we may be deprived of them by a thousand Accidents. This Consideration *Solomon* urgeth, to take Men off from an over-eager pursuit of these Things, *Prov. 23. 5. Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not ; for Riches certainly make to themselves wings, they fly away as an Eagle towards Heaven.* After we have sat brooding over an Estate many years,

years, it may all on a sudden, before we are aware, take wing, and *fly away like an Eagle towards Heaven*, soaring suddenly out of our sight, and never to return again.

And the same Argument St. Paul useth, to take off Mens Affections from the World, 1 Cor. 7. 31. because *the fashion of this World passeth away*, Παράγει τὸ σχῆμα τῆ κόσμου τούτου. He compares the Things of this World to a *Scene*, which is presently changed, and vanisheth almost as soon as it appears. Now seeing these Things are so uncertain, we should take heed how we fix our Hearts too much upon them; we should not make love to any thing that is so Fickle and Inconstant as this World is. We should be afraid to contract too near and intimate a Friendship with any thing which will forsake us, after we have Courted it with so much importunity, and purchas'd it with so much pains, and endeavour'd to secure it with so much Caution, and Tenderneſs.



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2. Our

2. Our Lives are as uncertain as these Things. If our Estates remain with us, we are continually in danger of being removed from them. And (as one says) it is folly to build our hopes upon a Match, where both Parties are so uncertain and inconstant. Why should we place our dearest Affections upon Things which we are not sure to enjoy one Moment? *Thou Fool, this night shall thy Soul be taken from thee, and then whose shall those things be?* I remember *Seneca* tells us a real Story, just answerable to the *Rich Man* in the Parable, of an Acquaintance of his, who by long and great Industry had arrived to a vast Estate; and just when he began to enjoy it, after one of the first good Meals which perhaps he ever made in his Life, that very night *his Soul was taken from him*, for presently after Supper he died. *In ipso actu bene sedentium rerum, in ipso procurentis fortune impetu.* In the height of his Prosperity, and in the full career of his good Fortune.

But



But if we live to enjoy for any time what we have got, we should remember that our Life is but a passage through the World, and that we are but *Pilgrims and Strangers in the World*, as all our Fathers were, that we have here no abiding place, no continuing City, but are travelling towards our own Country. And why should we load our selves whilst we are upon our journey, and cumber our selves with those things which will be of no use to us there, whither we are a going?

But the great wonder of all is, that this Vice should so strongly reign, and even grow upon Men in Old Age, and get strength, as weakness creeps upon us. This very thought *that we are to dye*, should work in us a great indifferency towards the Things of this World. But when Men are convinc'd they cannot live long, and that every step they take, they are in danger of stumbling into the Grave, this one would think should wean our Affections from this World; and yet usually none take so fast hold of it, and embrace



brace it so kindly as Old Men; like Friends, who tho' they know they must leave one another, yet are loth to part. Do we not see many pursue these things with as much eagerness and appetite, when they are leaving the World, as if they were to stay in it a hundred years longer? So that in this sense also, they are *Children again*, and are as fond of these Toys, as if they were just beginning the World, and setting out for their whole Life.

3. There is another Life after this, to be seriously thought on, and provided for with great care: and did Men firmly believe this, they would not with *Martha*, *busie themselves about many things*, but would *mind the one thing necessary*, and with *Mary chuse that better part which could not be taken from them*. They would overlook the trifles of this World, and scarce take notice of *the things which are seen*, but be only intent upon *the things which are not seen*; because *the things which are seen are but Temporal*, but *the things which are not seen are Eternal*. The great Concernments of another World would employ

employ their utmost Care, and their best Thoughts.

Whilst we are in this World, we should remember that *this is not our home, nor the place of our rest*; and therefore as Men do in an Inn, we should make a shift with those indifferent Accommodations which the World will afford us, and which we can have upon easie terms, without too much trouble and stir, because we are not to continue long here; and in the mean time we should cheer up our selves with the thoughts of the pleasure and the plenty of *our Father's house*, and of that full contentment and satisfaction which we shall meet withal, when we come to those *Everlasting Habitations*.

So that our great Care should be to provide for Eternity. If we have unbounded Desires, let us place them upon such Objects as are worthy of them. Let us *earnestly covet the best things*, and seek after *the true Riches*. We should so mind the World, as to make Heaven our great Care, as to  
make

make sure to provide for our selves bags that wax not old, a treasure in the Heavens, that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither Moth corrupteth, as our Saviour adviseth, Luke 12. 33. To the same purpose is the Counsel of St. Paul, 1 Tim. 6. 17, 18, 19. Charge them that are Rich in this World, that they be Rich in good works, willing to distribute, ready to communicate, laying up for themselves a good foundation; or (as the word *θεμέλιος* may also be rendred) a good treasure, against the time which is to come, that they may lay hold of Eternal Life.

I have told you that all these things will fail in a short space, we shall either be stripp'd of them, or separated from them when we come to dye, and shall look over to that vast Eternity which we must shortly enter upon; this World, and all the Enjoyments of it, will then be as nothing to us, and we shall be wholly taken up with the thoughts of another World, and be heartily sorry that the things of this World have taken up so much of our Time and Care, and  
that

that the great and weighty Concernments of all Eternity have been so little minded and regarded by us. Now seeing all these things shall be, pardon me, if I earnestly beg of you, in the midst of all your Worldly Cares, to have some Consideration for your Immortal Souls, which are no wise provided for by a great Estate, but are design'd for Nobler Enjoyments than this World can afford. When you are taking care to Feed and Cloath these dying Bodies, remember that better part of your selves which is to live for ever. Let not all your enquiry be, *what shall I eat? or what shall I drink? or wherewithal shall I be cloathed?* But sometimes ask your selves this question, *what shall I do to be saved?* I have an Immortal Spirit, it is but fit some Care should be taken of that, to train it up to Eternity, and to make it *fit to be made partaker of an Inheritance among them that are sanctified.*

The firm Belief and serious Consideration of the great Things of another World cannot surely but cool the  
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heat of our Affections towards these dying and perishing Things, and make us resolved not to do any thing whereby we may violate the peace of our Consciences, or forfeit our Interest and Happiness in another World.

2. By way of Remedy against this Vice of *Covetousness*, it is good for Men to be contented with their Condition. This the Apostle prescribes as the best Cure of this Vice, *Heb. 13. 5. Let your conversation be without Covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have; ἀρκέμενοι τοῖς παρῶν, being contented with the present, and thinking that sufficient. A Covetous Man cannot enjoy the present, for fear of the future; either out of fear that he shall come to want, or out of a sickness and uneasiness of Mind, which makes that nothing pleaseth him; But if we could bring our Minds to our Condition, and be contented with what we have, we should not be so eager and impatient after more.*

This



This Contentedness with our present Condition doth not hinder, but that Men by Providence, and Industry, and lawful Endeavours, may lay the Foundation of a more plentiful Fortune than they have at present. For provided a Man use no indirect and dishonest ways to increase his Estate, and do not torment himself with anxious Cares, do neither make himself guilty, nor miserable, that he may be Rich; provided he do not neglect better things, to attain these; and have not an insatiable Appetite towards them; provided he do not Idolize his Estate, and set his Heart upon these things; and if he can find in his heart to enjoy them himself, and to be Charitable to others; nothing hinders but that he may be contented with his present Condition, and yet take all fair Opportunities which the Providence of God puts into his hands of enlarging his Fortune. It is a good Character which the Poet gives of *Aristippus*,

*Omnis Aristippum decuit color, & status  
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*The Eighth Sermon.*

*Tentantem majora, ferè presentibus  
æquum.*

“ Every State and Condition became  
“ him ; for tho’ he endeavoured after  
“ more, yet his Mind was always in a  
“ manner equal to his present Condition.

But if a Man be discontented with the present, and restless because he hath no more, the whole World will not satisfy him; and if God should raise him from one step to another, he would never think his Fortune high enough, and in every degree of it would be as little contented as he was at first. Our Saviour represents this sort of Men by the *Rich Man* here in the Parable, who when his Barns were full, and ready to crack, his Mind was not fill’d; therefore he pulls them down, and builds greater; and if he had lived ’till these had been full, they must have gone down too, and he would still have built greater. So that tho’ he designed when he had raised his Estate to such a pitch, to have sat down, and taken his ease, yet his *Covetous* humour would have been

been stirring again, and still have slept in between him and Contentment, and for ever have hindred him from arriving at it.

*Thirdly*, By way of Direction, I would perswade those who are Rich, to be Charitable with what they have. If God have blest us with abundance, and we would not be like this *Rich Man* here in the Parable, we must lay out of our Estates, in ways of Piety and Charity, for the Publick Good, and for the private Relief of those who are in want; for that is the ἀποδοσις, or Moral of the Parable; *so is he that layeth up Treasures for himself, and is not Rich toward God*. So shall he be; such an issue of his Folly may every one expect, (to be taken away from his Estate before he comes to enjoy it) *who layeth up Treasures for himself, but is not Rich toward God*; but does not lay up Riches with God. How is that? By Works of Mercy, and Charity. This our Saviour calls *laying up for our selves Treasure in Heaven*, Mat. 16. 20. And at the 33<sup>d</sup> Verse of

## The Eighth Sermon.

this Chapter, he calls giving of Alms, *providing for our selves baggs which wax not old, a Treasure in the Heavens which faileth not*; they who do thus, who are *Rich in good Works, ready to Distribute, willing to Communicate*, are said to *lay up for themselves a good Treasure against the time which is to come, that they may lay hold on Eternal Life*, 1 Tim. 6. 18, 19. *Extra fortunam est quicquid donatur*; “whatsoever we give to the Poor is safely disposed, and put out of the reach of Fortune, because it is laid up in Heaven, where we may expect the return and recompence of it. Charity to our poor Brethren is a certain way of transmitting our Riches into the other World, to make way for our reception there. So our Lord tells us, Luke 16. 9. *I say unto you make to your selves Friends of the Mammon of Unrighteousness, that when ye shall fail* (that is) when ye shall leave this World, and the enjoyments of it, *they may receive you into Everlasting Habitations.*

At

At the Great Day of Judgment, when we shall all appear before God, and, according to our Saviour's Representation of the Proceedings of that Day, shall hear him thus Expostulating with Men, *I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat; thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; naked, and ye cloathed me not; sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not;* what would we then give, how much of our Estates, if we had them then at our Command, would we not be willing to part withal, to have that Comfortable Sentence past upon us; *Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you, before the foundation of the World!* But if we be found among those who would spare nothing out of their abundance to any Charitable Use and Purpose, I have not the heart to tell you how miserable the Condition of such Persons will be, and how dreadful a Doom will be passed upon them.

It is a sad Consideration, that there are some Persons in the World, who



seem to be only defective in this Duty; like the young Man in the Gospel, who lacked but *this one thing* to make him perfect; *he had kept the Commandments from his youth*, and preserved himself from those gross Sins which the Law did plainly forbid; and yet for want of *this one thing* he parted from his Saviour, and, for any thing we know, fell short of Eternal Life. There are many who are very Devout and Religious, much in Prayer and Fasting, and all the other frugal exercises of Piety, which cost them no Money; but yet are very defective in Alms, and Charity, which in Scripture are so frequently joyn'd with the Fastings and Prayers of good Men; and by this means, all their Devotion and Diligence in the other parts of Religion is lost, and will not bring them to Heaven. And is it not great pity, that they who *are not far from the Kingdom of God, should fall short of it?* that they, who in most other things bid so fair for Heaven, should break with God upon this single Point?

I know

I know Men have several ways to deceive their own Hearts, and to defend themselves against all these Assaults.

*First*, They say they are injurious to no Man, in not being Charitable. And 'tis true, that in Humane Courts the Poor can have no Action against the Rich for want of Charity to them; but yet for all that, they do injuriously detain that which doth not of right belong to them. They are Cruel, and Hard-Hearted, and they are guilty of high breach of Trust, in respect of God, whose Stewards they are, and who hath dealt so liberally with them in the Things of this Life, on purpose to oblige them to be so to others. That which thou storest up, without regard to the necessities of others, is unlawfully detained by thee, since God intended it should have been for *Bread to the hungry, and Cloaths to the naked, and for help and relief of those who are ready to perish*. For why art thou Rich, and another Poor? But that thou mightest exercise thy Charity upon those fitting Objects which the Providence of God presents to thee. It had been easie for God  
(since

(since *the Earth is his, and the fulness thereof*) so to have contrived Things, that every Man should have had a sufficiency, and have been in a moderate Condition; but then a great many Virtues would have been shut out of the World, and lost, for want of opportunity to exercise them. Where then had been the Poor Man's Patience, and the Rich Man's Pity? and the contentedness of Men of moderate Fortune?

*Secondly*, Men say that they have Children to provide for. And do so in God's Name, for he allows us to do it liberally; but unless their Condition and Wealth set them above an ordinary Calling, do not chuse so to provide for them, as to take them off from all Employment, lest you put them in the ready way to be undone; have a Care of leaving them no other business, but to spend what you have left them; if you do so, they will in all probability do that work very effectually, and make as much haste to be Poor, as you did to make them Rich. If Men could but be contented to do that which is  
best

best for their Children, they might do a great deal better for themselves, by disposing what they have to spare in Charity.

*Thirdly*, Others would fain excuse themselves from this Duty at present, by telling what they intend to do when they come to Die, that is, when they can keep what they have no longer. It seems then thou wilt leave it to thy Executor to do good in thy stead. This shews thou hast no great heart to the business, when thou deferrest it as long as ever thou canst. But why wilt thou trust another with the disposal of thy Charity, rather than thy self? This is hardly to offer either a *Reasonable*, or a *Living Sacrifice to God*, to do good only when we are dead. It is well that God hath made all Men Mortal, and that *it is appointed for all Men once to die*; otherwise some Men would never do good at all.

Wherefore setting aside these, and all other excuses, which will not be admitted, nor will any of us have the  
face

*The Eighth Sermon.*

face to plead them at the Day of Judgment; I say, setting aside all Excuses whatsoever, let us resolve to do good with what we have whilst we can; and to that end let us lay aside some Portion of what God has blest us withal, for the uses of Piety, and Charity, and let it bear some decent Proportion to what God hath given us.

There is never want of proper Objects for our largest Charity, and now less than ever. Besides those at home, which present themselves to us in great numbers every day, God hath sent us many from abroad, who call loud upon us for our pity and help, both as they are reduced to the greatest extremity, and are Sufferers in the best Cause, that of our common Religion, which ought now to be dearer to us than ever. Let us shew Mercy now, as we expect Mercy from others, in any day of our distress in this World, and as ever we hope, when ever we come to appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ, *to find Mercy with the Lord in that Day.*

Consider

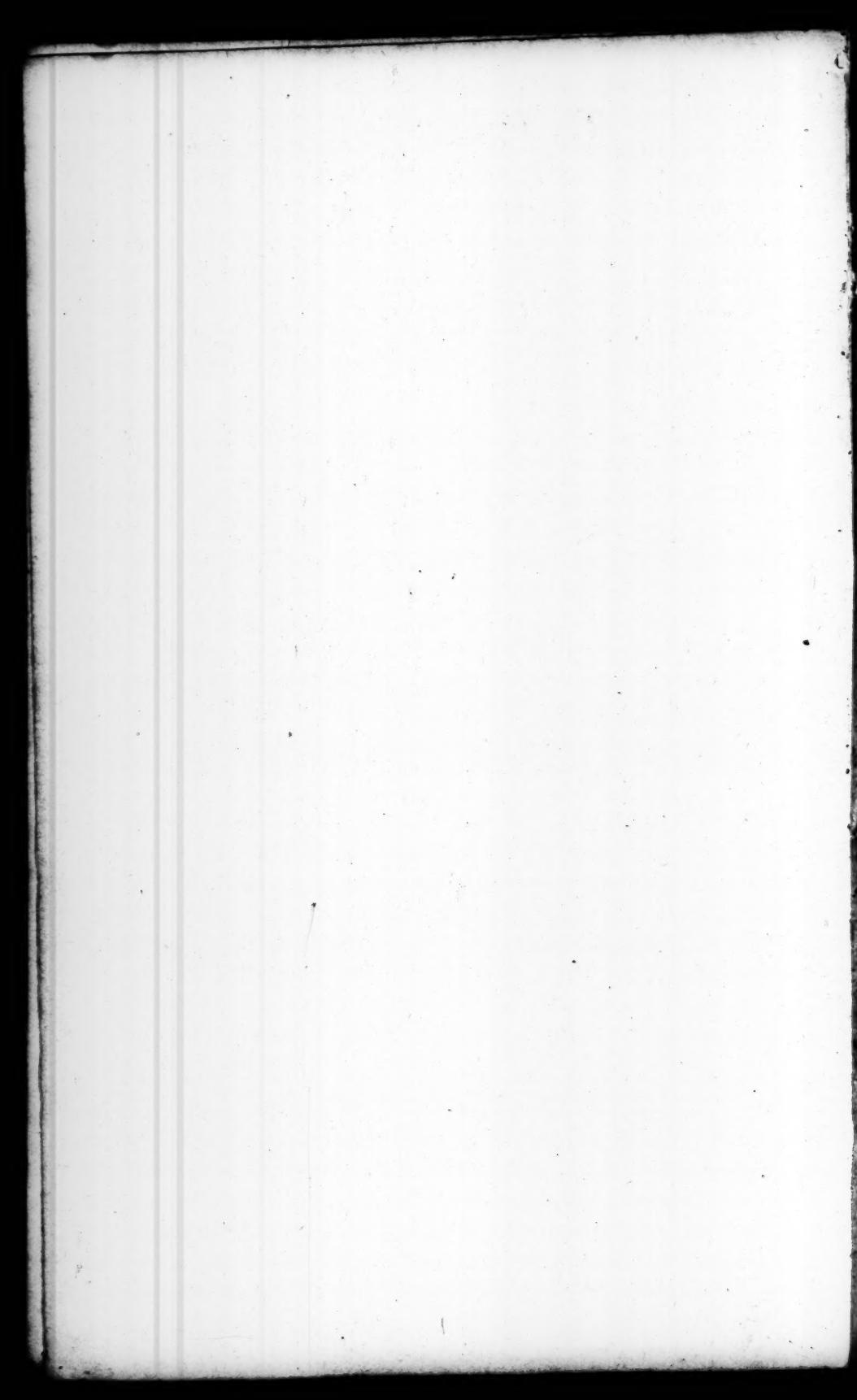
Consider what I have said upon this Argument, and let this extraordinary kind of Caution, which our Saviour here gives, make a deep impression upon your Minds; *Take heed and beware of Covetousness; for a Man's Life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*

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S E R M O N  
O N

MATTH. VI. 33.

*But seek ye first the Kingdom of  
God, and his Righteousness; and  
all these things shall be added unto  
you.*

**I**N the latter part of this Chapter,  
our Saviour doth in a long Dis-  
course caution his Disciples against  
an Inordinate Care about the Things  
of this Life, which he concludes with  
a strict Charge to make Religion their  
first and great Concernment, and  
above all Things to take Care to se-  
cure

*The Ninth Sermon.*

cure to themselves the happiness of another Life ; *But seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness, &c.* In the handling of which words, I shall do these *Four Things*.

*First*, I shall explain what is here meant by *the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness*.

*Secondly*, What by *seeking* of these.

*Thirdly*, I shall lay down some necessary and plain Directions, which if we observe, we cannot miscarry in this matter.

*Fourthly*, I shall set before you some of the most proper and powerful Motives and Encouragements to the minding of this great Interest and Concernment ; among which, I shall particularly consider the Argument or Encouragement here used in the Text, *and all these things shall be added unto you*.

1. I shall explain to you what is here meant by *the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness*.

*First*,

First, What is meant by *the Kingdom of God*. And there are two Famous acceptations of this Phrase, and both of them very frequent in the New Testament. Sometimes it is used to signify the State of the Gospel, or the Christian Religion, which by the *Jews* was called *the Kingdom of God*, or *the Kingdom of the Messias*, Mark 1. 15. *The Kingdom of God is at hand*; that is, the State or Dispensation of the Gospel is now approaching, and ready to take place. Luke 17. 20. The *Pharisees* demanding of our Saviour *when the Kingdom of God should come*, that is, when the Reign of the *Messias* should commence; he answers them, *the Kingdom of God cometh not with observation*; that is, not with any Temporal Pomp and Splendor, so as to draw the eyes of People after it, as the *Jews* did vainly imagine; but *the Kingdom of God*, ἐντὸς ὑμῶν ἐστίν, *is among you*; not *within you*, as our Translation hath improperly rendred it; *the Kingdom of God* (he tells them) is already come unto you, the *Messias* is among you, and ye are not

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aware

aware of him. In the like sense this Phrase is used, *Mat. 21. 43. the Kingdom of God* (that is, the Gospel) *shall be taken from you, and given to a Nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.* And so likewise the Phrase of *the Kingdom of Heaven* is used, *Mat. 11. 11.* where speaking of *John the Baptist*, our Saviour saith, that *among them that were born of Women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist;* that is, there was no greater Person than he, under the *Jewish Dispensation*, and yet *he that is least in the Kingdom of Heaven* (that is under the Dispensation of the Gospel) *is greater than he.*

Now tho' this sense of *the Kingdom of God* be not wholly excluded in the Text, yet there is another sense of this Phrase very usual likewise in the Scripture, and which is more agreeable to the scope of our Saviour's Argument and Discourse; and so it signifies that future state of Happiness and Glory which good Men shall be advanced to in another World, in opposition to this Life, and the Enjoyments

ments of it, which our Saviour had before forbidden his Disciples to be so solicitous about. *Take ye no thought, saying, what shall we eat? or what shall we drink? or wherewithal shall we be cloathed?* And then it follows in direct opposition to this inordinate and solicitous Care about Worldly Things, *but seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness.* That is, be not so solicitous about the Conveniencies and Necessaries of this Life, as about the Happiness of the other, and the Means to it. And this sense of this Phrase of the Kingdom of God is so very frequent in the New Testament, that I shall not need to give particular Instances of it.

*Secondly, what is meant by Righteousness; seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness. Righteousness, in the strictest and most proper sense of the word, signifies the particular Virtue of Justice; and very frequently in the Old Testament it is used for Charity to the Poor, or Almsgiving, Psal. 37. 25, 26. I have been young, and now am old, yet have I not*  
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seen



*seen the Righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread; he is ever merciful, and lendeth; and Psal. 112. 9. he hath dispersed, he hath given to the Poor, his Righteousness endureth for ever. But Righteousness in its largest and most extended sense, comprehends all the Virtues of a good Man; and so it signifies here in the Text, and in many other places of Scripture.*

So that *the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness*, comprehends the whole business of Religion, our *last End*, which is *Eternal Life and Happiness* in another World; and *the way and means* to this End, which is *Righteousness*, or that Universal Goodness which God requires of us, and whereof he himself is a Pattern and Example to us; for which Reason 'tis call'd *his Righteousness*. And in this sense of our *last End*, and *the way and means* to it, *the Kingdom of Heaven, and Righteousness*, are used in another place, even of this Sermon of our Saviour's upon the Mount, *Matth. 5. 20. Except your Righteousness shall exceed the Righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter*

*enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; where Righteousness is made the necessary Means and Condition of Eternal Life.* I proceed in the

Second Place, to explain what is meant by *seeking first the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness*. And this signifies the greatest intention of mind, and earnestness of endeavour about the business of Religion, in order to our attaining of Eternal Happiness; such a seriousness and earnestness of endeavour as Earthly-Minded Men use about the Things of this World. *For after all these things* (says our Saviour immediately after the Text) *do the Gentiles seek*; τὰ ἔθνη ἐπιζητεῖ, which words signify an intense Care, and vigorous Endeavour; *but seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness*; that is, be ye who profess your selves Christians, as intent upon the business of Religion, and the Salvation of your Souls, as the Heathen, who are in a great measure ignorant of God and another Life, are about the things of this Life.

And here are two Things to be explained.

1. What is here meant by *seeking the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness*; And,

2. What by *seeking them in the first place*.

For the *First*: A sincere and earnest *seeking of the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness*, does imply in it these Four Things.

*First*, A fix'd Design and Resolution as to the End; that we do not only propound to our selves the Eternal Happiness and Salvation of our Souls as our chief End, but that we be immoveably fixt upon it, and always have it in our aim and design; that here we set up our Resolution, if it be possible, to be happy for ever; that we have this End always in our eye, and be firmly resolved to do all that we can towards the attaining of it.

Not

Not that we are obliged always actually to think upon it ; but to have it frequently in our Minds, and habitually to intend and design it, so as to make it the scope of all our Endeavours and Actions, and that every thing we do be either directly and immediately in order to it, or some way or other subservient to this Design, or however not inconsistent with it ; like the term and end of a Man's Journey, towards which the Traveller is continually tending, and hath it always habitually in his intention, tho' he doth not always think of it every step that he takes, and tho' he be not always directly advancing and moving towards it, yet he never knowingly goes out of the way. And tho' he bate and lodge by the way, and does many other things which do not directly set him forward, yet they are all subservient to his Journey, or in prosecution of it ; or at least no wilful deviations from it. Thus it should be with us, while we are Sojourning in this World ; our fix'd aim and design should be to get to Heaven, and thither we should be

continually tending in our Desires and Endeavours.

And if this Resolution be deeply rooted and fix'd in our Minds, it will govern all our Actions, and keep them steady to their main End. Whereas, if we be uncertain, and unresolv'd upon our great End, and be divided between the Happiness of the next Life, and the present Enjoyments of this, we shall be fickle and unsteady in all our Motions. He that hath two Ends, can pursue neither vigorously ; but while he is moving towards the one, he leans and inclines to the other ; and like a Needle between two Loadstones, is always in a doubtful and trembling Condition ; inclines to both, but is constant to neither : And this is the meaning of that Aphorism of St. James, *The double-minded Man is unstable in all his ways.* He that is unresolved as to his main End, hath two Minds, and can prosecute nothing vigorously : But if our Mind be once fix'd and resolv'd, that will determine and govern all our motions, and inspire us with Diligence, and

and Zeal, and Perseverance in the prosecution of our End.

*Secondly, Seeking the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness,* implies incessant Care and Diligence as to the means ; that we make Religion our business, and exercise our selves in the Duties of it, both in publick and private, at proper times and seasons, with the same seriousness and application of Mind, as Men do in their Callings and Professions, for the gaining of Wealth and Preferment ; especially on the *Lord's-Day*, which God hath taken to himself, and set apart for the Duties of his Worship and Service. Not that we are excused from minding Religion at other times ; but that those who are prest and straitned by the necessary Cares of this Life, may be sure to mind it then, and may have no colour of excuse for the neglect of it at that time, which God hath allotted for that very purpose, and which it is unlawful to employ about our Worldly Affairs. God expects that we should serve him at other times, that we should live in an habitual sense of him, and (as Solo-

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*mon* expresseth it, *Prov. 23. 17.*) *Be in the fear of the Lord all the day long*; so as to be careful not to offend or transgress in any thing, and so as to redeem all Opportunities for the exercise of Piety, and Devotion; but *this Day* he peremptorily challengeth to himself, and expects we should imploy it in his Service, and Dedicate it to Religion, to the Contemplation of God and Heavenly things, and the Care of our Immortal Souls, with the same seriousness and diligence, as we do upon other days *labour for the bread which perisheth*; and the less leisure we have upon other days for this purpose, the more entirely should we Devote and Consecrate *this Day* to the Purposes and Duties of Religion.

Not but that our whole Life, and all the Actions of it, should be under the government of Religion, and directed by the Laws and Rules of it; and it should be our continual Care and Endeavour to please God in all things, and we should take as much pains, and be as heartily concerned to be good Men, as the Men of the World are to grow Rich and Great in this World; nay so much more, by how much it  
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is a better and nobler Design to improve in Grace and Virtue, than to prosper and thrive in our Temporal Estate; and we do not in good earnest *seek the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness*, if this be not our great study and endeavour, to subdue our Lusts, and govern our Passions, and, in a word, to reform whatever is amiss in the inward frame and temper of our Minds, and in our outward Conversation. And indeed nothing does require greater diligence, and attention, and care, than for a Man to become truly and thoroughly good, to be meek and humble, and patient and contented, and resigned to the Will of God in every Condition; to be peaceable, and charitable, and placable, and ready to forgive; these are great and difficult things, and, whatever we think, not the work of a Wish, or the effect of a sudden Resolution before the receiving of the Holy Sacrament, no nor the fruit of frequent and fervent Prayers, without the hearty concurrence of our own Care and Endeavour, to render our Lives such, as we pray God by his Grace to assist and enable us to be.

*Thirdly,*

*Thirdly, Seeking the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness,* does further imply zeal and earnestness in the pursuit of this Design : And this is a degree above diligence, for zeal is an ardour and fervency of Mind in the prosecution of a thing for which we are greatly concerned, and which we vehemently desire to obtain ; it is the hottest and most intense degree of our affection towards any thing, of our desire and love, mixt with anger at every thing that stands in our way, and hinders us from obtaining what we seek after ; such an heat as Ambition does commonly inspire Men withall, in the pursuit of Power and Preferment. Such ought to be the temper of our Minds, and the edge of our Spirits, in *seeking the Kingdom of God,* as does usually possess Men in seeking the Kingdoms of this World, and the Glory of them. We must remember, that it is a *Kingdom* which we seek for, and aspire after, not like the unstable and tottering Kingdoms of this World, but a *Kingdom which cannot be shaken,* as the Apostle calls it.

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So that the greatness of the Design, and the Excellency of what we seek after, will justifie and warrant the highest degree of a discreet zeal and fervour in the prosecution of it; and therefore no wonder that the Scripture in this matter useth words that import the greatest vehemency and earnestness, bidding us *to strive to enter in at the strait gate, to labour and watch, to run, and wrestle, and fight*, and, in a word, *to give all diligence, to make our Calling and Election sure.*

Lastly, *Seeking the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness*, does imply patience and perseverance in our endeavours after them, and that we never cease our pursuit of them, 'till we have obtained them; and this, notwithstanding all the difficulties and discouragements, the opposition and persecution that we meet with *for Righteousness sake*: For this we must expect, and reckon upon before-hand, to encounter many difficulties; and find many discouragements in the ways of Religion; for *strait is the gate, and narrow*

*narrow is the way that leads to life, as our Lord himself hath told us : Nay we must count to be grievously persecuted for Righteousness sake, and, if God see it good for us, to pass through many Tribulations, before we shall enter into the Kingdom of God; and therefore we had need to be armed with a great deal of Patience, and a very firm and obstinate Resolution, to enable us to bear up, and to hold out against all these; for this is a necessary qualification for our seeking the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness. So our Lord hath told us, Mat. 10. 22. he that endureth to the end, shall be saved; if we hope to receive the Crown of Life, we must be faithful to the death, Rev. 2. 10. And to the same purpose St. Paul declares, Rom. 2. 7. that they only shall be made partakers of Eternal Life, who by patient continuance in well doing, seek for Glory, and Honour, and Immortality.*

You see what is meant by *seeking the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness*; it remains briefly to be shewn, in the *Second* place, what is meant by *seeking these first*; *seek ye first the Kingdom of God,*



God, and his Righteousness; that is, let this be your main and principal Design, so as to take place of all others in your esteem and affections, in your aim and endeavour; in comparison of this, mind nothing else, not the Comforts and Conveniencies, no not the Necessaries of Life, *what ye shall eat, and what ye shall drink, and wherewithal ye shall be clothed.* These you see our Saviour instanceth in before the Text, as not to be regarded and taken care of, when they come in competition with *the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness.* And our Saviour tells us elsewhere, that not only none of the Comforts and Necessaries of Life are to be valued against him, and his Religion; but that even this Temporal Life it self, as dear as it is to us, is to be parted withall, and given up, rather than to quit the profession of his Truth and Religion, *Mat. 10. 37, 38. He that loveth Father or Mother more than me, is not worthy of me; and he that loveth Son or Daughter more than me, is not worthy of me.* He instanceth in the nearest Relations, those towards whom we have the most tender  
and



and relenting affections, and yet he tells us, that the Consideration of his Truth and Religion ought to take place of these, nay even of Life it self; for so it follows, *and he that taketh not his Cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.* St. Luke expresseth it more strongly and vehemently, *Luke 14. 26. If any man come to me* (that is, take upon him the profession of my Religion) *and hate not his Father, and Mother, and Wife, and Children, and Brethren, and Sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my Disciple.* When these come in competition with our Religion, and the great interest of our Eternal Salvation, we are to regard and value them no more than if they were the Objects of our hatred, but to set aside all consideration of affection to them, so far as it would tempt us from Constancy in our Religion, and the Care of our Souls.

So that when our Saviour bids us *first to seek the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness*, his meaning is, that Religion, and the Concernments of our Souls, and the Eternal Happiness of

of them in another World, should be our first and chief Care; and that all other things should be made subordinate and subservient to this great Design, and be no further minded by us, than they really are so: For that which is our great End, will subdue all other things, and bring them into subjection to it, and will reject them, and throw them aside, if they be inconsistent with it. If Heaven be our utmost aim, and in order to that, it be our great study and endeavour to be Righteous, and Holy, this Resolution and Design, sincerely entertained, will over-rule all other Considerations, and make all the things of this World to stoop and give way to that which is our chief End, the Eternal Happiness and Salvation of our Souls. And thus I have done with the *Second* Thing I proposed, namely, what is meant by *seeking the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness*; and what by *seeking them first*.

I proceed in the *Third* place, to lay down some plain Rules for our Dire-

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tion and Furtherance in *seeking the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness*; that is, in the great business of Religion.

*First*, Let us always live under a lively and powerful sense of another World; that we are placed here in this World, but for a little while, and *that* wholly in order to our preparation for a better and a happier Life. Let this thought be often in our Minds, that Eternity is the most considerable duration, and the next World the place of our Everlasting abode, where we must dwell and continue for ever; and therefore our present state is but of little Moment and Consideration to us, but only in order to our future and Everlasting Condition. We may please our selves here for a little while with Toys, and Trifles, with Dreams and Shadows of Pleasure and Happiness, and may be exercised with some Troubles and Afflictions for a short space, *for a moment* (as the Apostle calls it, *our light afflictions which are but for a moment*, and so indeed it is, compared with all Eternity; but the

the substantial and durable Happiness or Misery remain for Men in the other World, and will certainly be their portion, according as they have demeaned themselves in this World.

Now the serious Consideration of this cannot fail to put us upon vigorous preparations for another World, and to make us wholly intent upon our Eternal Concernments, and to resolve whatever becomes of us in this World, to take effectual Care that we may be Happy for ever. He that firmly believes the Immortality of his Soul, and a Life after Death, which will never have an end, must needs take into Consideration his whole duration, and bend all his Care and Thoughts, how he may avoid the greatest and most lasting Misery, and secure to himself an Immortality of Bliss and Happiness.

*Secondly,* Let us be always under a Conviction of the absolute and indispensable necessity of Holiness and Righteousness, as the only way and means whereby the Kingdom of God is

to be attained, and that Holiness and Happiness are not to be separated, the one being a necessary Condition and Qualification for the other; and consequently, that it is the vainest thing in the World for any Man to hope to enter into *the Kingdom of God*, without endeavouring after *his Righteousness*; there is so strong a connexion between them, that a Man may as reasonably expect to be well and at ease without Health, as to be Happy without Holiness; for this makes us like to God, and our Likeness and Conformity to God is that alone which can make us capable of the Blessed Sight and Enjoyment of God. We must be *Partakers of a Divine Nature*, in order to our participation of the Divine Blessedness. And the Consideration of this will effectually engage us to *seek the Righteousness of God*, without which we shall never enter into *his Kingdom*; and to *follow Holiness*, without which no Man shall see the Lord.

Thirdly, Let us always remember that *Righteousness* is of a great extent, and comprehends in it all goodness, it takes



takes in all the Duties of Religion, and the Practice of all of them ; it is a Complication of all Graces and Virtues, of all the Parts and Ingredients, of all the Duties and Offices of a good Man: To denominate a Man *Righteous*, all Causes must concur ; all the Essential Principles and Parts of Religion and Goodness must meet together; Knowledge and Practice, Faith and Good Works, Right Opinions and Real Virtues, an Orthodox Profession and a Holy Life, abstaining from Sin and doing of Righteousness, Purity of Heart and Unspotted Manners, Godliness and Honesty, the Bridling of our Tongue, and the Government of our Passions, and *above all things Charity, which is the Band of Perfection.*

For *Righteousness* is our Conformity to the Law of God, as *Unrighteousness* and Sin is the Transgression of it: Now this, if it be real and sincere, will be uniform and universal, equally respecting all the Laws of God, and every part of our known Duty, and will not content it self with an espe-



cial regard to one or two Precepts of the Law, tho' never so considerable, and then allow it self in the neglect and violation of the rest; no nor with the observation of the Duties of one Table of the Law, if it overlook the other; no nor with Obedience to all the Commandments of God, one only excepted. St. James hath put this very Case, and determined it, that *he that shall keep the whole Law, save only that he offend in one point, is guilty of all;* that is, he is not sincere in his Obedience to the rest: And therefore if we seek the Righteousness of God, our Righteousness must be Universal; *as he that hath called us is holy, so must we be holy in all manner of Conversation,* in the tenor of our Actions, and the whole course of our Lives; and any one Reigning Sin and Vice, any gross and notorious defect in the Virtues of a good Life, will spoil all our Righteousness, and will effectually shut us out of the Kingdom of Heaven.

Fourthly, Let us wisely subordinate the several parts and duties of Religion to one another, according to the intrinsic

intrinsical worth and value of them, that so we may mind every part of Religion in its due place, and according to the true nature and importance of it. Knowledge and Faith are in order to Practice, and a good Life; and signifie nothing, unless they produce that; the Means of Religion, such as Prayer, and Fasting, diligent Reading and Hearing of the Word of God, Reverent and Devout Receiving of the Blessed Sacrament, are of less account and value, than that which is the End of all these, which is to make us inwardly and really good, and *fruitful in all the works of Righteousness, which by Jesus Christ are to the Praise and Glory of God.* And therefore the Means of Religion which I have mentioned, are to be regarded and used by us, in order to the attaining of these Ends, without which they are meer Formality and Hypocrisie, and instead of finding acceptance with God, they are *an abomination to him, and his Soul hates them.*

And so likewise the Circumstances of Religion are less considerable than

the substantial Means and Instruments of it. And therefore all Rites and Ceremonies are in Religion of less consideration, than the Substance of God's Worship, and ought always to be subordinate to it. In like manner, the Moral Duties of Religion, comprehended under *the two great Commandments of the love of God, and our Neighbour*, because they are of Eternal, and indispensable obligation, are to be preferred to matters of meer positive Institution; and where they cannot stand together, that which is positive ought to be set aside, and to give way for the present, to that which is moral and good in its own Nature, and not only because it is Commanded, and Enjoyed; for in this Case God hath expressly declared that *he will have Mercy, and not Sacrifice*. Upon which ground our Saviour declares, that the Law of the *Sabbath* ought to give place to *works of Mercy*. Upon the same account, Peace and Charity are to be valued above Matters of Nicety and Scruple, of doubtful Dispute and Controversie; because the former are unquestionably good, the latter doubtfully and uncertainly so. All

All these things ought to be considered, and are of great moment to make a Man sincerely and wisely Religious. For Men may keep a great stir about some parts of Religion, and be very Careful and Diligent, Zealous and Earnest about the Means and Instruments of Religion, and in the Exercises of Piety and Devotion; and yet be destitute of the Power and Life of it, and fall short of that inward, and real, and substantial *Righteousness*, which alone can qualifie us for *the Kingdom of God*.

The *Fifth* and last Direction I would give, is this; That we have a particular regard to the great Duty of Charity, or Alms-giving, this being very frequently in Scripture called *Righteousness*, as being an eminent part of Religion, and a great Evidence of the truth and sincerty of our Piety. And this our Saviour particularly directs to, as the way to *the Kingdom of God*, Luke 12.33. After this general Exhortation, to *seek the Kingdom of God*, he instanceth in *Charity*, as the direct way to it; *give Alms, provide for your selves Bags that wax not old, a Treasure in the Heavens,*  
that

*that faileth not.* And elfewhere our Saviour fpeaks of this Grace and Virtue, as that which, above all others, will make way for our admiſſion into Heaven, *Luke 16. 9. I ſay unto you, make to your ſelves friends of the Mammon of unrighteouſneſs, that when ye fail, they may receive you (or ye may be received) into Everlaſting Habitations.* And St. Paul calls it, *laying in ſtore for our ſelves a good foundation*; or (as the word may better be rendred in this place) *a good treaſure againſt the time to come, that we may lay hold on Eternal Life,* *1 Tim. 6. 19.* St. James ſpeaks of it, as a main and moſt eſſential part of Religion, and the great Evidence of a true and ſincere Piety, *Jam. 1. 27. Pure Religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, is this; to viſit the Fatherleſs and Widows in their affliction.* Finally, our Lord inſtanceth in this, as the very thing which will admit us into, or ſhut us out of Heaven; by the performance whereof we ſhall be Abſolved, and for the neglect whereof we ſhall be Condemned, in the Judgment of the Great Day, *Mat. 25.* So that this part of Righteouſneſs or Religion ought in

a more especial manner to be regarded by us ; because upon the performance or neglect of this Duty, our Eternal Happiness doth so much depend.

The *Fourth* and last thing only remains to be spoken to ; which is, to set before you the most proper and powerful Motives and Incouragements, to the minding of this great Interest and Concernment. But this will be the Subject of another Discourse.

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The Second

# S E R M O N

O N

M A T T H. VI. 33.

*But seek ye first the Kingdom of  
God, and his Righteousness; and  
all these things shall be added unto  
you.*

**T**H E S E Words, which I began  
to Discourse upon the last Day,  
are a strict Charge and Com-  
mand to all Christians, to mind the  
business of Religion in the first place,  
and to take all imaginable Care to se-  
cure the Happiness of another Life;  
*but seek ye first the Kingdom of God,*  
and



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The Second  
**S E R M O N**  
O N

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*but seek ye first the Kingdom of God,*  
and

*and his Righteousness ; and all these things shall be added unto you.* In the handling of which Argument,

*First, I Explained what is meant by the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness.*

*Secondly, I shew'd what is meant by seeking these ; and what by seeking them first.*

*Thirdly, I laid down some Rules for our Direction and Furtherance in this great Business.*

I shall now proceed to represent to you, in the

*Fourth and last place, some of the most proper and powerful Arguments and Encouragements, to engage us to the minding of this great Interest and Concernment ; amongst which, I shall in the last place particularly consider the Encouragement here given in the Text, seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness ; and all these things shall be added unto you.*

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1. My First Argument shall be from the Worth and Excellency of the things we seek, *the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness*; which are certainly the greatest and best things we can seek. *The Kingdom of God*, is the Eternal Salvation of our Souls, Everlasting Life and Happiness in another World; which, to animate our Endeavours, and to tempt our Ambition the more, are set forth to us under the notion of a *Kingdom*. And what will not Men do to obtain that? what pains will they not take? what hazards will they not run? what difficulties will they not grapple with, and break through if they can, to come at a *Kingdom*? which when they have obtained, they are exposed to as many, and commonly to more Cares and Fears, to greater Difficulties and Dangers in the keeping, than they were for the getting of it: And yet all this Men will do for a *corruptible Crown*, for one of the petty Kingdoms and Principalities of this World, which are continually tottering, and ready to be overturned by open violence, or to be under-



undermined by secret Treachery. But *the Kingdom* which I am speaking of, and perswading you and my self to seek after, is not like the Kingdoms of Men, and of this World ; it is called *the Kingdom of God*, to signifie to us the Excellency and stability of it ; as much beyond any of the Kingdoms of this World, as the Heavens are high above the Earth, and as God is greater than Man ; *a Kingdom which cannot be shaken, a Crown which fadeth not away, a Scepter which cannot be wrested from us.*

But to quit the Metaphor, and speak to the Thing ; *the Kingdom of God* imports the Eternal Salvation of our Souls ; I say of our *Souls*, which both in respect of the Dignity of their Nature, and their Immortal duration, are infinitely more valuable than any of the perishing things of this World, and ought to be much dearer to us. Other things are without us, they neither constitute our Being, nor are essential to our Happiness ; but our Souls are our selves, and the loss of them is our utter ruine and destruction. So that nothing is to be regarded

regarded by us with equal Care and Concernment, as the Salvation of our Immortal Souls; that is, that we may be rescued from Eternal Misery, and Everlastingly Happy in another World. And can we be at too much cost and pains upon such a design, to escape so dismal a Condition; so dreadful a ruine, as that of Body and Soul to all Eternity? Can any Man be concerned enough to bring about so great a good to himself? or, can he purchase it too dear, whatever he give or part with for it? a good so desirable and so durable, as our being Happy for ever. When we purchase the things of this World, the Riches and Honours of it, at the expence of so much Time, and Care, and Trouble, we pay dear for Trifles and Fancies; but Eternal Happiness is a Jewel of so inestimable a Price, that a Wise Merchant will have it at any rate, and *sell all that he hath to purchase it.*

Of such value is *the Kingdom of God*; and next to it is *Righteousness*, which is the only Way and Means whereby this *Kingdom* is to be attained, and

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therefore to be sought by us with the greatest diligence and earnestness : For that which is the only Means to a great and desirable End, and which alone can make us capable of that End, and which in truth is a degree of it, is valuable next to the End, and almost equally with it ; and such is *Righteousness*, in respect of *the Kingdom of God* ; it is the only means to it, it is that alone which qualifies us, and makes us capable of Happiness ; nay, it is an essential ingredient into it, and that which does in a great measure constitute the Happiness of Heaven : For that temper of Mind, that Conformity and likeness to God, which Holiness and Righteousness brings us to, is the true Foundation of our Happiness, and according to the best apprehensions we have now of it, is the very formal Cause and Essence of our Blessedness. So St. *John* tells us, 1 *Joh.* 3. 2. *It doth not yet appear what we shall be ; but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him ;* that is, we do not now distinctly understand wherein the Happiness of the next Life consists, we are not able to frame a clear and perfect

perfect Idea of it ; but this we know in general, that it consists in our likeness to God, in a conformity to the Moral Perfections of the Divine Nature, which are exprest by the name of *Purity* and *Holiness* ; and therefore every one that hopes for the Happiness of Heaven, must endeavour after Holiness ; *every Man that hath this hope in him, must purifie himself, even as he is pure.*

So that the things which I am pressing you to seek after, are most effectually recommended, by telling you what they are ; *the Kingdom of God* is Eternal Life and Happiness, and *his Righteousness* is Universal Holiness and Goodness, without which no Man is qualified for this Blessed State. Now if there be any thing better than Goodness, any thing more desirable than a Happiness which hath no bounds, nor no End ; do not mind them, nor look after them : but if there be not ; then certainly these are worthy of the Care and Endeavour of our whole Life.

*Secondly*, Another Consideration that should very much excite and quicken our Endeavour and Diligence in seeking these things, is the difficulty of obtaining them. This I confess is no Encouragement, but it is a very good Motive and Argument to whet our industry in seeking these things, when we plainly see that they are not to be had upon other terms. And this Consideration our Saviour useth to quicken us *to strive* and to contend earnestly for Eternal Life, *Mat. 7. 14. because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leadeth to Life, and few there be that find it : And Luke 13. 24. Strive to enter in at the strait gate ; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able.*

Seeking here, in opposition to *striving*, is a faint and weak Endeavour, which will not carry us through this narrow and difficult passage ; and this is the reason why many miscarry, who make some attempts towards Heaven ; but they do not *strive*, they do not put forth

forth any vigorous Endeavours to get thither.

Now the difficulty of attaining Eternal Happiness, ariseth from the difficulty of the Way and Means to it; and it is therefore hard to attain *the Kingdom of God*, because it is hard to attain *his Righteousness*. As desirable as it is, it must be acknowledged very difficult for a Man to raise himself to that temper and disposition of Mind, so to subdue his Lusts, and govern his Passions, to bridle his Tongue, and order all the Actions of his Life, as is necessary to qualify him for Happiness, and to make him fit to be admitted into *the Kingdom of God*.

And this difficulty is chiefly in our selves, but greatly increased by temptation and opposition from without: Chiefly I say in our selves, from the strong bias of our Evil and Corrupt Inclinations, and the strong power of vicious Habits and Customs, which when they are grown inveterate, do Tyrannize over us, and make us perfect Slaves, and lead us Captive at their



pleasure ; so that our Nature must be quite changed, and as the Apostle expresseth it, we must be *renewed in the Spirit of our Minds*, our Souls must be new moulded and fashioned, we must be as it were *Created and Born again*, before we can *enter into the Kingdom of God*. In this our Saviour is positive and peremptory, *Joh. 3. 3. verily verily I say unto you, except a Man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God*. This difficulty indeed is greatest at first, but it is considerable afterwards, 'till a through Change be made, and new Inclinations planted in us, and the contrary habits of Grace and Virtue be super-induced.

And that which increaseth the difficulty is outward Temptation and Opposition from the World, and the Devil ; which to withstand and resist, requires great Courage and Resolution, great Watchfulness and Guard over our selves. But yet for our Comfort, these Difficulties are not insuperable to that Grace and Assistance, which God is always ready to afford to us upon so good an Occasion, and to so good a purpose ;  
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*greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the World.* And this I am sure is Matter of great encouragement to us, that tho' the difficulty of *working out our Salvation* be great, yet if we do in good earnest set about it, God is ready to assist and second our sincere Endeavours, *to work in us both to will and to do of his own goodness,* and so to prevent us with his gracious Favour, and to further us with his continual Aid, that finally by his Mercy we may obtain Eternal Life.

*Thirdly,* Another powerful Argument to Care and Diligence, is the fatal Danger of Miscarriage in a Matter of so great Concernment. We may do many things in Religion, and take some pains to get to Heaven, and yet fall short of it. The Rich young Man in the Gospel, our Saviour tells us, was *not far from the Kingdom of God,* and he broke with our Saviour only upon one Point, he was too much addicted to the World, and loth to part with his great Possessions, and distribute them in Charity to the Poor, and there-

upon he left our Saviour, and for ~~any~~ any thing that we find, never returned to him again.

If the World govern and bear sway in our Hearts, if we *mind Earthly things* first, and make these our chief Care and Design, *the Kingdom of God and his Righteousness* shall not be added unto us; it we will not mind them *in the first place*, they are too good to be Accessories.

And if upon any one point we miscarry, either out of love to the World, or affection to any other Lust or Vice that we are loth to part withal, our miscarriage is fatal, and the ruine which we bring upon our selves irreparable; for the Soul once lost, is lost for ever. If we have neglected the opportunity of *working out our own Salvation*, while we are in this World, it will never return into our power again, Death will shut the door against us, and we shall never see *the Kingdom of God*.

*Fourthly,*

*Fourthly*, It is a mighty encouragement to us to consider, that if we sincerely *seek the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness*, there is not only a fair probability of obtaining them, but all the security we can desire. Men may be in good earnest for the things of this World, may love them with all their Hearts and Souls (as we see too many do) and seek them with all their might and strength, and yet after all their Endeavours may be shamefully frustrated and disappointed of their End. There are many Examples of this kind daily before our eyes, and yet Men are not discouraged from seeking these things. A fair probability, nay almost a possibility of attaining them, is enough to a Worldly-Minded Man to drudge and toil for them. Why the same Affection, the same Zeal, the same unwearied Endeavour to serve God, and to save our Souls, would Infallibly bring us to Heaven. It was a sad but true Saying of Cardinal *Wolsey*, when he was leaving the World, "Had I been but as careful to please God, as I have  
"been

“been to serve my Prince, he would  
“not have forsaken me now in the  
“time of my gray hairs.

Nay it is to be hoped, that less Diligence and Care about the Concernments of our Souls, and another Life, than many Men use about the things of this Life, will secure our Eternal Happiness; or else it is to be feared, that but very few would be saved: And who would not place his Industry and Endeavour upon a Design in which he is sure not to miscarry, if he do but heartily and in good earnest pursue it? Especially when it will be of infinite greater advantage to him, than any Design he can propound to himself for this World. If a Man may be certainly Happy for Ever, upon the same, or easier terms, than he can ordinarily compass any of those little Designs which Men propose to themselves in this World, who would not seek that which is most worthy the having, and which he is surest to obtain?

*Fifthly,*

*Fifthly*, and Lastly, the Encouragement here in the Text is not inconsiderable ; that if we *seek the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness, all these things shall be added unto us.* This certainly is a very tempting Consideration ; for who would not be glad to reconcile the enjoyment of this World with the hopes of Heaven, and Eternal Happiness ? But Men do not generally like our Saviour's Method, they would seek the things of this World in the first place, and get to Heaven at last ; they would be content to seek the one, and have the other cast in and conferred upon them, without their seeking. But this will not be granted, this way will not do. And yet our Saviour hath gone as far as one would think could in Reason be desired ; he hath promised that if we will make Religion, and the Salvation of our Souls, our first and chief Care, that *all these things shall be added unto us.* So that the Design of going to Heaven, and being Happy for ever, is no ways inconsistent with a competent portion of the things of this Life. *Godliness*  
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(the Apostle tells us) *hath the promise of this Life, and of that which is to come.* The business of Religion, the practice of a Holy and Virtuous Life, is no hindrance to a Man's thriving in his Temporal Estate; nay in many Respects it is apt to promote and advance it; by engaging us to diligence in our Calling, and by deriving the blessing of God upon our honest and lawful Endeavours; by obliging us to the strict and constant practice of Truth, and Justice, and Fidelity in all our Dealings and Commerce, which are the best way to establish a clear and solid Reputation, and good Esteem among Men, which is an unspeakable advantage in Business, and, at the long run, one of the best and most lasting Instruments of Prosperity and Success.

Besides that Religion frees a Man from those Passions and Vices, which do naturally tend to dissipate and ruine Mens Estates; as Intemperance and Lewdness, which are every way chargable Vices, and do not only take Men off from Business, and render them

them unfit for it ; but waste their Estates, and bring many other inconveniencies upon their Persons and Families. Religion makes Men meek and peaceable, and inoffensive in word and deed, which is a great security against chargeable Suits and Contentions, and all sorts of Injuries and Affronts from others. Among all the Beatitudes of our Saviour, he only promisseth Temporal Happiness to Meekness, *Blessed are the Meek, for they shall inherit the Earth.* They who provoke and offend no body, are likely to be least disturbed and disquieted by others in their Possession and Enjoyments; *who will harm you* (saith the Apostle, 1 Pet. 3. 13.) *if ye be followers of that which is good?* Some may be so perverse as to persecute a Man for his goodness ; but it rarely happens ; most Men have not only a kindness, but a veneration for true goodness.

By all these ways Religion naturally tends to the Temporal Prosperity of Men, and the promoting of their wellfare and happiness even in this World ; besides that the Providence  
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By all these ways Religion naturally tends to the Temporal Prosperity of Men, and the promoting of their welfare and happiness even in this World; besides that the Providence  
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of God is very peculiarly concerned for good Men, and a special Blessing attends them in all their Undertakings. So that excepting the Case of Persecution (which God will particularly Consider, and Reward in another World) the Religious and good Man, who sincerely *seeks the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness*, stands as fair, and is upon as good terms, for all the lawful Enjoyments of this World, as he that makes it his only Design to be Rich and Great in this World; nay as to the necessaries of Life, and a competency of outward things, he hath a much greater and better security from the Providence and Promise of God, than the Men of the World have by all their Care and Pains.

Besides that he hath this Considerable advantage, by minding these things only as accessories, that if he miss of them, he hath something better to support him in the want of them; being secure of a Happiness which this World can neither give nor take from him. But now the Worldly Man, if he be defeated in his Designs,  
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is of all Men most miserable, because he hath nothing else to Comfort him, nothing else to trust to; he fails of his hopes as to this World, and hath done what in him lies, to make his Case desperate, as to the other.

Upon all these Considerations and Encouragements, you see how reasonable it is, that we should make Religion, and the Concernments of another Life, our great Care and Business. And yet how are these neglected by the greatest part of Mankind! and by the best of us (God knows) not minded as they ought, and as they deserve! What can we say for our selves, in excuse of so intolerable a folly? There are two or three things which Men commonly pretend, if not in justification, yet in mitigation and excuse of this great neglect.

*First*, they pretend great difficulties and discouragements in the ways of Religion. This I have already acknowledged to be true, so far as to awaken our Care, and to whet our Industry; but by no means to make us despond,  
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and give over all Care of so great a Concernment, because of the Difficulties it is attended withall. Men who have no mind to a thing, are apt to imagine great difficulties in the attaining of it, and to magnifie them in their fancies beyond Reason. As the People of *Israel*, when they were to enter into *Canaan* (which was the Type of the Kingdom of Heaven) represented the Inhabitants of the Land, whom they were to Conquer, more terrible than in truth they were; reporting to one another, that the Land was full of Giants, and Sons of *Anak*, Men of prodigious Stature, which reached up to Heaven. And this the Wise Man observes to be the perpetual excuse of *the Sloathful*; when they have no mind to a thing, they say *there is a Lyon in the way*; that is, they fancy to themselves Dangers and Terrors which are not. Thus Men who are averse from Religion, and have no mind to be at the trouble and pains to get to Heaven, are apt to complain of the monstrous and insuperable Difficulties of Religion, and how hard it is for a Man to mortifie his

his Lusts, and subdue his Appetites, and govern his Passions, and to do all those things which are necessary to bring him to Heaven. Well! it is acknowledg'd to be difficult. And is it not so to get an Estate, and to rise to any thing in this World? The true pains which Men take about these things, shew that they are difficult; only when Men have a mind to a thing, and their Heart is set upon it, they do not stand to complain of the difficulty, but buckle to it, and grapple with it.

Is Religion difficult? And what is not so, that is good for any thing? Is not the Law a difficult and crabbed study? Does it not require great labour, and perpetual drudging, to excel in any kind of Knowledge, to be Master of any Art or Profession? In a word, is there any thing in the World worthy the having, that is to be gotten without pains? And is Eternal Life and Glory the only slight and inconsiderable thing, that is not worth our Care and Industry? Is it fit that so great a good should be exposed to

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the faint and idle Wishes, to the cheap and lazy Endeavours of sloathful Men? For what Reason? Nay with what Conscience can we bid less for Heaven and Eternal Life, than Men are contented to give for the things of this World; things of no value in Comparison, not worthy the toiling for, not sure to be attained by all our Endeavours; things which *perish in the using*, and which, when we have them, we are liable to be deprived of by a thousand Accidents? One fit of a Feaver may shatter our Understandings, and confound all our Knowledge, and turn us into Fools and Ideots; an Inundation or a Fire may sweep away hand and vnder our Estates; a Succession of Calamities may in a few hours make the Richest and Greatest Man as Poor as Job, and set him upon a Dunghill.

But be the Difficulty what it will of attaining *the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness*, they are to be sought at any rate; because they are absolutely necessary, and we miserable and undone if we have them not. And therefore

fore not to dissemble in the Matter, the Difficulties of Religion are considerable; but then they are much greater at first, and will every day abate and grow less, and the work by degrees will become easie, and turn into Pleasure and Delight; a Pleasure so great, as none knows but he that hath it; and he that hath it, would not exchange it for all the sensual Pleasures and Enjoyments of this World.

Secondly, Others pretend want of time for the minding of so great a Work. And this is very true, that all Persons have not equal leisure for this purpose; some are much more straitned than others, and more taken up with the necessary Cares of this Life: but God hath put no Man upon this hard necessity, that for want of time he shall be forced to neglect his Body and his Health, his Family and Estate, to save his Soul. And yet if any Man were brought to this distress, it were well worth his while to secure his Eternal Salvation, tho' it were with the neglect and loss of all other things. But those who are most straitned for

time, have so much as is absolutely necessary: for there is a considerable part of Religion which does not require time, but Resolution and Care. Not to commit Sin, not to break the Laws of God, not to be intemperate, *to make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill the Lusts thereof,* does not spend time, but saves it for better Purposes; so that every Man hath time not to do that which he ought not to do: And for the *positive* part of Religion, whether it consists in the exercise of our Minds, or in the External Acts of Religion; no Man is so distressed, but he hath time to think of Heaven, and Eternity; time to love God, to esteem him, and delight in him above all things. And this a Man may do very frequently, and very acceptably, while he is labouring and travelling about his Worldly Affairs; while his hand is upon the Plow, his heart may be with God; and while he converseth here upon Earth, his Thoughts and Affections may be in Heaven. Every Man hath time to pray to God every day, for his Mercy and Forgiveness, for his Grace and Assistance,



ance, for his Preservation and Support, and to thank him heartily for all his Blessings, and Benefits. And a little time seriously employed in this kind, would have the same acceptance with God, as the more solemn and longer Devotions of those who have more leisure and opportunities for them. To be sure we have all of us time to serve God upon his own Day, and to employ it wholly in the Exercises of Piety, and in the Care and Consideration of our Souls.

But this, when all is said, is the Case but of very few; most of us have no colour for this Complaint; *non inopes temporis, sed prodigi sumus*, (as Seneca says) “we are not Poor, “but Prodigal of our time, and lavish “it away profusely upon Folly and “Vanity. Our Vices and Lusts, our Pleasures and Diversions, consume and divert those precious hours, which should be employed to these better purposes; nay many times Time oppresseth us, and is a burthen to us, and lies upon our hands, and we know not how to get rid of it; and yet we chuse



rather to let it run waste, than to bestow it upon Religion, and the Care of our Souls; insomuch that I fear this will be the Condition of many, that when they were at a loss what to do with their Time, and knew not how to spend it, they would not lay it out upon that which was best and most necessary; for this surely is the very best use that can be made of Time, to prepare and provide for Eternity.

*Thirdly*, Others pretend it will be time enough to mind these things hereafter. But this (as bad Excuses seldom hang together, and agree with one another) directly contradicts the former pretence, which supposeth so much time necessary, and more than many have to spare; and yet now they would make us believe that a very little time will suffice for this Work, and that it may be done at any time, even just when we are going out of this World. But this, of all other, is the strangest Interpretation of *seeking the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness first*, to put it off to the very last. This surely is a greater error on the other hand, to think

think that the business of Religion is so quickly to be dispatched, and that the great work of our Lives can be crowded into so narrow a corner of it, that the time of Sickneſs and Old Age, nay the hour of Death, well employed to this purpose, will be ſufficient. Alas ! what can we then do that is good for any thing ? that can in Reason be thought either acceptable to God, or available for our ſelves ? When we have not Senſe and Underſtanding enough to diſpoſe of our Temporal Concernments, and to make our Wills, do we think we ſhall be fit to repent of the Sins and Miſcarriages of our whole Lives, and to make our Peace with God ? Every Man muſt not expect to have *Saul's* Fortune, who when he was wearied with ſeeking his Father's Aſſes, met with a Kingdom. We muſt not think when we are tired with purſuing the Follies and Vanities of this World, to retire into Heaven, and to *ſit down with Abraham, Iſaac, and Jacob, in the Kingdom of God.*

Our Saviour hath taken care to caution us against this desperate Folly, by a Parable to this very purpose, of the *Foolish Virgins*, who having trifled away their time 'till the Bridegroom was coming, and neglected to get *Oyl into their Lamps*, (by which we are to understand all those good Preparations and Dispositions which are necessary to qualify us for the Kingdom of God) I say, having neglected their opportunity of getting this *Oyl*, while they were looking after it too late, the Door was shut against them. They thought to have repaired all at last, by borrowing of others, and supplying themselves that way.

And thus many deceive themselves, hoping to be supplied out of another store, when they have no grace and goodness of their own; out of the Treasure of the Church, from the redundant Merit of the Saints, and their Works of Supererrogation, of which some believe (I know not for what Reason) that there is a  
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this purchase of the Merits and good Works of others, *the Bridegroom came*, and the Wise Virgins, that were ready, went in with him to the Marriage, and the rest were shut out.

And there are those likewise among our selves, who having been careless to qualifie themselves for *the Kingdom of God*, hope to be supplied out of the infinite Treasure of Christ's Merits : but this also is a vain hope. For tho' there be Merit enough in the Death and Sufferings of Christ to save all Mankind, yet no Man can lay claim thereto, who does not perform the Condition of the Gospel.

Others think by sending for the Minister, when the Physician hath given them over, to receive in a few hours such Advice and Direction, as will do their business, as effectually, as if they had minded Religion all their Lives long ; and that a few Devout Prayers said over them when they are just imbarcking for another World, will, like a Magical Wind, immediately waft them over into the Regions of Bliss and Immortality. But

But let us not deceive our selves; we may defer the Business so long, 'till we shall get nothing by our late application to God, and crying to him *Lord, Lord, open unto us,* but that severe Answer, *Depart from me, ye workers of Iniquity, I know ye not whence ye are.* If we would not have *this* our Doom, let us *first* seek the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness, that so having our Fruit unto Holiness, our End may be Everlasting Life.

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PSAL. CXIX. 96.

*I have seen an end of all Perfection; but thy Commandment is exceeding broad.*

**T**His *Pfalm* seems to have a great deal more of Poetical Number and Skill in it, than at this distance from the Time and Age in which it was written, we can easily understand. The main Scope and Design of it is very plain and obvious; namely, to Magnifie the Law of God, and the observation of its Precepts, as that wherein true Religion doth mainly

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ly consist. And indeed if we attentively read and consider it, every part of this *Psalm* does with great variety of expression, and yet very little difference of the sense, descant upon the same ground, viz. The Excellency and Perfection of the Law of God. And the words of the *Text* seem to be as full and comprehensive of the sense and design of the whole *Psalm*, as any one Sentence in it; I have seen an end of all Perfection, but thy Commandment is exceeding broad.

These words are variously rendred, and understood by Interpreters, who yet in this variety do very much conspire and agree in the same sense. The *Chaldee Paraphrase* renders the words thus, I have seen an end of all things, about which I have employ'd my Care; but thy Commandment is very large. The *Syriac version* thus, I have seen an end of all Regions, and Countries (that is, I have found the compass of this habitable World to be finite, and limited) but thy Commandment is of a vast extent. Others explain it thus, I have seen an end of all Perfection; that is, of all the things of this

this World, which Men value and esteem at so high a rate; of all Worldly Wisdom and Knowledge, of Wealth, and Honour, and Greatness, which do all perish and pass away; *but thy Law is Eternal, and still abideth the same;* or, as the Scripture elsewhere expresseth it, *the word of the Lord endureth for ever.*

*Thy Law;* that is, the Rule of our Duty Natural and Revealed; or, in a word, Religion; which consists in the Knowledge and Practice of the Laws of God; is of greater perfection than all other things which are so highly valued in this World: for the perfection of it is Infinite, and of a vast influence and extent; it reacheth to the whole Man, to the Happiness of Body and Soul; to our whole duration both in this World, and the next, of this Life, and of that which is to come. And this will clearly appear, if we consider the *Reasonableness* and the *Wisdom* of Religion, which consists in the knowledge of God, and the keeping of his Laws.

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*First, The Reasonableness of Religion ;* which is able to give a very good account of it self, because it settles the Mind of Man upon a firm Basis, and keeps it from rolling in perpetual uncertainty ; whereas Atheism and Infidelity wants a stable Foundation, it centers no where but in the denial of God and Religion, and yet substitutes no Principle, no tenable and constituent Scheme of things in the place of them ; its whole business is to unravel all things, to unsettle the Mind of Man, and to shake all the common Notions and received Principles of Mankind ; it bends its whole force to pull down and to destroy, but lays no Foundation to build any thing upon, in the stead of that which it pulls down.

It runs upon that great absurdity which *Aristotle* (who was always thought a great Master of Reason) does every where decry, as a Principle unworthy of a Philosopher, namely, a progress of Causes *in Infinitum*, and without End ; that this was the Cause  
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of that, and a third thing of that, and so on without end, which amounts to just nothing; and finally resolves an infinite number of effects into no first Cause; than which nothing can be more unskilful and bungling, and less worthy of a Philosopher. But this I do not intend at present to insist upon, having treated largely on the same subject upon another \* Occasion. I shall therefore proceed in the

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the Author.

Second place, to consider the *Wisdom of Religion*. The fear of the Lord is *Wisdom*, so saith the *Psalmist*; it is true *Wisdom* indeed, it is the *beginning of Wisdom, Caput Sapientiae*, the top and perfection of all *Wisdom*. Here true *Wisdom* begins, and upon this Foundation it is raised and carried on to Perfection; and I shall in my following Discourse endeavour to make out these *two* things.

1. That true *Wisdom* begins and is founded in Religion, in the fear of God, and in the keeping of his *Commandments*.

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2. That this is the Perfection of Wisdom, there is no Wisdom without this, nor beyond it.

*First*, True Wisdom begins and is founded in Religion, and the Fear of God, and Regard to his Laws. This is the first Principle of Wisdom, and the Foundation upon which the whole Design of our Happiness is to be built. This is in the first place to be supposed, and to be taken into Consideration in all the Designs and Actions of Men: This is to govern our whole Life, and to have a main influence upon all the Affairs and Concernments of it. As the first Principle of Humane Society, and that which is to run through the whole frame of it, is the Publick good; this was always to be taken into Consideration, and to give Law to all Laws and Constitutions about it: So Religion is the first Principle of Humane Wisdom, by which all our Actions are to be conducted and govern'd; and all Wisdom which does not begin here, and lay Religion for its Foundation, is preposterous, and  
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begins at the wrong end ; and is just as if in the forming of Humane Society, every one in the settlement of the Constitution, and the framing of Laws, should have an eye to his own private and particular advantage, without regard to the Publick Good, which is the great End of Society, and the Rule and Measure of Government and Laws, and in the last issue and result of things, the only way to procure the settled welfare, and to secure the lasting Interests of particular Persons; so far as that is consistent with the Publick Good. And it would be a very preposterous Policy to go about to found Humane Society upon any other terms, and would certainly end in Mischief and Confusion.

And such is all the Wisdom of Men, in relation to their true Happiness; which does not begin with Religion, and lay its foundation there ; which does not take into Consideration God, and his Providence, and a Future State of Rewards and Punishments after this Life. All Wisdom which does not proceed upon a supposition

tion of the truth and reality of these Principles, will certainly end in shame and disappointment, in misery and ruine; because it builds a House upon the Sand, which when it comes to be try'd by stress of weather, and assaulted by violent storms, will undoubtedly fall, and the fall of it will be great.

And this Error every Man commits, who pursues Happiness by following his own Inclination, and gratifying his Irregular Desires, without any Consideration of God, and of the restraint which his Laws have laid upon us, not for his own Pleasure, but for our good. For when all things are duly Considered, and all Accounts cast up, it will appear upon a just Calculation of things, that all the restraints which the Laws of God lay upon Men, are highly reasonable, and greatly for their benefit and advantage, and do not abridge us of any true Pleasure or Happiness; but are Wise and Merciful Provisions of Heaven, to prevent our harm and mischief; so that we are not Wise, if we act without regard

regard to God, and his Laws, and are not willing to be govern'd by him, who loves us better than we do our selves, and truly designs our Happiness, and Commands us nothing but what directly tends to it. For the Laws of God are not Arbitrary Constitutions, and meer instances of Sovereign Will and Power; but Wise Rules and Means to procure and advance our Happiness.

And in like manner, all that Wisdom which Men use to compass their Worldly Designs, of Riches, and Greatness, without Consideration of the Providence of God, and Dependance upon it for the Success of our Affairs, is all perfect Folly and Mistake. For tho' the Design be never so well laid, and vigorously prosecuted, and no Means which Humane Wisdom can devise for the attaining of our End have been omitted by us; yet if we leave God out of the Account, we forget that which is Principal, and signifies more to the Success of any Design, than all other things put together. For if God fa-



vours our Designs, the most improbable shall take effect; and if he blow upon them, the most likely shall miscarry. Whenever he pleaseth to interpose, to cross the Counsels and Designs of Men, *the Race is not to the swift, nor the Battel to the strong; neither yet bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favour to men of skill; but time and chance happens to all.*

So that it is great folly not to Consider the Providence of God in all our Designs and Undertakings, not to implore his Favour and Blessing, without which nothing that we take in hand can prosper. That which is Principal to any Purpose, ought to be considered in the first place, nothing being to be attempted either without or against it. And such is the Providence of God in all Humane Affairs; it is more considerable to the promoting or hindering of any Event, than all things in the World besides; and therefore all Policy, which sets aside God and his Providence, is vain; because

*cause there is no wisdom, nor understanding, nor counsel against the Lord.*

So likewise all that Wisdom which only considers and regards this short Life, and the narrow Concernments of it, and makes provision only for our welfare in this World; and therefore can only be tempted with the hopes of Temporal Advantages, and terrified only with the danger of Temporal Evils and Sufferings; but hath no sense of an Immortal Spirit within us, no prospect of a Life after Death, no Consideration of a Happy or Miserable Eternity, of Rewards and Punishments, infinitely greater than all the Temptations and Terrors of Time and Sense; I say all this is a preposterous and pernicious Wisdom, and proceeds upon a false Supposition, and a quite contrary Scheme of Things to what really is; and consequently our whole Life, and all the Designs and Actions of it do run upon a perpetual mistake, and a false Stating of our own Case; and whatever we do pursuant to this Mistake is foolish and hurtful, and so far

from conducing to our true interest, that it is all either besides it, or contrary to it; because we act upon a Supposal only of this Life, and a Being only in this World, and that there is nothing either to be feared or hoped for beyond it; and being thus grossly mistaken, we set our hearts only upon Temporal Things, and study our present security and satisfaction, and in all our Counsels and Actions are swayed only by the Consideration of Temporal Good and Evil, of the present Ease and Pleasure, the Disturbance and Pain of our Fleshly and Sensual Parts; without any sense of our own Immortality, and of that Everlasting State which remains for us in another World.

But there is (my Brethren) most certainly there is another Life after this; we are not *Beasts*, if we do not make our selves so; and if we die, we shall not die like them, neither shall our last End be like theirs? For whatever we may think or wish, it will not be in our power to extinguish our own Beings when we have

a mind to be rid of them, and to chuse whether or no we shall live for ever.

And if this be a false Scheme of things which we have framed to our selves, and proceeded upon (as undoubtedly it is) then our whole Life is one great Error, and a perpetual Mistake, and we are quite wrong in all that we design to do. Our Wisdom hath begun at the wrong end, and we have made a false Calculation and Account of things, and have put our Case otherwise than it is; and the farther we proceed upon this Mistake, our Miscarriage will be so much the more fatal in the issue. But if our Wisdom begin at the right end, and our Case be truly stated, that God hath put into these frail and mortal Bodies of ours, Immortal Spirits that shall live for ever; and hath sent us into this World to sojourn here for a little while, and to be disciplin'd and train'd up for Eternity; and that after a short proof and trial of our Obedience, we shall be translated into an Everlasting State of unspeakable  
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Happiness or Misery, according as we have demeaned our selves in this World; if we believe this to be truly our Case, our Interest is then plainly before us, and we see where our Happiness lies, and what remains for us to do, in order to the obtaining of it, and what we are to expect to suffer, if we do it not.

Now this Foundation being laid, it is evident, that the best thing we can do for our selves, is to provide for our Future State, and to secure the Everlasting Happiness of another Life. And the best way to do that, is to live in obedience to those Laws which our Maker, and our Sovereign, hath prescribed to us; and according to which he will one day Sentence us to Eternal Rewards or Punishments.

It is evident likewise, that all our sensual Appetites and Desires are to be bounded by the Rules of Reason and Virtue, which are the Laws of God; and that no present Ease and Pleasure, Trouble and Suffering, are  
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to be considered and regarded by us, in competition with the things which are Eternal; and that Sin is of all other the greatest Evil, and most mischievous to our main Interest, and therefore with all possible Care to be avoided; and that the favour of God is to be sought, and the Salvation of our Souls to be provided for at any pains and expence whatsoever, and even with the hazard and loss of our dearest Interests in this World, yea and of Life it self.

And now if this Matter hath been rightly stated, then Religion, and the Fear of God, is the first Principle and Foundation of true Wisdom, and that which we are to consider, and take along with us in all the Designs and Actions of our Lives; and all Wisdom which does not begin here, is preposterous, and will prove folly in the issue.

*Secondly,* As Religion is the beginning of Wisdom, so it is the perfection of it, it is the highest point of Wisdom in which we can be Instructed.



structed. *The fear of the Lord* (says Solomon, Prov. 15. 33.) *is the instruction of Wisdom.* *A good Understanding* (says David, Psal. 111. 10.) *have all they that do his Commandments.* The Practice of Religion is the perfection of Wisdom; and he understands himself best, who lives most according to the Laws of God. And this I might shew, by instancing in particular Virtues, the practice whereof is much Wiser, and every way more for our Interest, than the contrary Vices; but this is too large an Argument to engage in, and therefore I shall content my self at present, briefly to shew, that the chief Characters and Properties of Wisdom do all meet in Religion, and agree to it.

The First Point of Wisdom is to understand our true Interest, and to be right in our main End; and in this, Religion will best instruct and direct us. And if we be right in our main End, and true to the interest of it, we cannot miscarry: but if a Man mistake in this, he errs fatally, and his whole Life is Vanity and Folly.

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Another property of Wisdom is to be steady and vigorous in the Prosecution of our main End. To oblige us hereto, Religion gives us the most powerful Arguments, the glorious Happiness, and the dismal Misery of another World.

The next Point of Wisdom is, to make all things stoop and become subservient to our main End. And wherever Religion bears sway, it will make all other things subordinate to the Salvation of our Souls, and the Interest of our Everlasting Happiness; as the Men of this World make every thing to submit and give way to their Covetous, and Ambitious, and Sensual Designs.

Another part of Wisdom is, to Consider the Future, and to look to the last End and Issue of things. It is a common folly among Men, to be so intent upon the present, as to have little or no regard to the future, to what will be hereafter. Men Design and Labour for this present Life, and  
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their short continuance here in this World, without taking into serious Consideration their main Duration, and their Eternal Abode in another World. But Religion gives us a clear Prospect of a Life after Death, and overlooks Time, and makes Eternity always present to us, and minds us of making timely provision and preparation for it. It takes into Consideration our whole Duration, and inspires us with Wisdom, to look to the End of things, and to what will be hereafter, as well as to what is present.

It is likewise a great Property of Wisdom, to secure the main Chance, and to run no hazard in *that*. And this Religion directs us to take care of, because the neglect of it will prove fatal.

Another Mark of Wisdom is, to lay hold of Opportunities, those especially, which, when they are once past, will never return again. There are some Seasons wherein great things may be done, which if they be let slip,

flip, are never to be retrieved. A Wise Man will lay hold of these, and improve them; and Religion inculcates this Principle of Wisdom upon us, that this Life is the opportunity of doing great things for our selves, and of making our selves for ever; this very day and hour may, for ought we know, be the last and only Opportunity of Repentance, and making our Peace with God? Therefore *to day, whilst it is called to day*, let us set about this necessary work, *lest any of us be hardened through the deceitfulness of Sin*; to morrow it may be too late to begin it, and the Justice of God may cut us off whilst we are wilfully delaying it; and the Opportunities of Saving our Immortal Souls may vanish, and be for ever hid from our eyes.

The next Property of Wisdom is, to foresee Dangers, and to take timely care to prevent them. *The Prudent Man* (saith Solomon) *foreseeth the Evil, and hideth himself*; that is, shelters and secures himself against it; *but the simple pass on, and are punished*; that is,  
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the Evil overtakes them, and their Folly is punish'd in their fatal Ruine. Now the greatest Danger is from the greatest Power; even from *him who is able to save, and to destroy*; I will tell you (says the Wisdom of God) *whom ye shall fear; fear him, who after he hath killed, can destroy both Body and Soul in Hell.*

Again, another main Point of Wisdom is, to do as little as we can to be repented of, trusting rather to the Wisdom of Prevention, than to that of Remedy. Religion first teacheth Men Innocency, and not to offend; but in case we do, (*as in many things we offend all*) it then directs us to Repentance, as the only Remedy. But this certainly is folly, to Sin in hopes of Repentance, that is, first to make work for Repentance, and then run the hazard of it; for we may certainly Sin, but it is not certain that we shall Repent. And if it were, yet it is great folly to lay in before hand, and to make work for trouble; *Næ tu stultus homuncio es, qui malis veniam precari, quam non peccare, was*

a Wise Saying of old Cato; *Thou art* (says he) *a silly Man indeed, who chusest rather to ask Forgiveness, than not to Offend.* If a Man had the best Remedy in the World, he would not make himself sick to try the Virtue of it; and it is a known Comparison, and a very fit one, that Repentance is *Tabula post Nausfragium, a Plank after Shipwreck.* But I am greatly afraid that thousands of Souls, who have trusted to it, have perished before they could get to Land, with this Plank in their arms.

The last Character of Wisdom I shall mention is, In all things to consult the Peace and Satisfaction of our own Minds, without which nothing else can make us Happy; and this, Obedience to the Laws of God doth naturally procure. *Great Peace have they* (says David) *that love thy Law, and nothing shall offend them.* The work of Righteousness, says the Prophet, *shall be Peace, and the effect of Righteousness, quietness, and assurance for ever.* The fear of God, and the keeping of his Commandments, is the best Preserva-

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tive against the troubles of a guilty Conscience, and the terrifying apprehensions of a Future Judgment. And this is the great Wisdom of Religion, that whosoever liveth according to the Rules and Precepts of it, prevents the chief Causes of discontent, and lays the surest Foundation of a perpetual satisfaction of Mind, a Jewel of inestimable price, which none knows but he that has it; and he that hath it, knows the value of it too well to part with it for *the pleasures of Sin, which are but for a season*, and which always prove *bitterness in the end*, and for the little sweetness which they yielded, leave a terrible sting behind them.

Thus have I briefly represented the *Reasonableness* and *Wisdom of Religion*. It is of Infinite perfection, and of a vast influence and extent, it reacheth to the whole Man, the Happiness of Soul and Body; and to our whole duration, the Happiness of this World and the next; for *Godliness* (that is true Religion and Piety) *hath the Promise*

*Promise of this Life, and of that which is to come.*

But now where are the Effects of true Religion, in the full compass and extent of it, to be found? Such real Effects as do in any measure bear a proportion to the power and perfection of their Cause. For nothing certainly is more Excellent and Amiable in its definition than true Religion is ; but, alas ! how imperfect is it in the Subject, I mean in us, who ought to shew forth the power and perfection of it, in the Practice and Actions of our Lives, the best demonstration of the excellent frame and temper of our Minds.

What a conflict and struggling do the best Men find between their Inclination and their Duty? How hard to reconcile our Practice and our Knowledge, and to make our Lives to agree with the Reason of our Minds, and the clear Conviction of our Consciences? How difficult for a Man, in this dangerous and imperfect state, to be in any measure either so wise or so good

as he ought? How rare is it for a Man to be good natur'd, gentle, and easie to be intreated, without being often betray'd into some weakness and sinful compliances, especially in the bad Company of our Betters? How next to impossible is it to be strict and severe in our Lives, without being sower? to govern our Lives with that perpetual Caution, and to maintain that evenness of temper, as not to be sometimes peevish, and passionate? and when we are so, not to be apt to say with *Jonah, we do well to be angry?*

There are *two* Precepts in the New Testament, that seem to me to be the nicest of all other, and hardest to be put in practice. One is that of our Blessed Saviour, *Be wise as Serpents, and innocent as Doves.* How hard is it to hit upon the just temper of Wisdom and Innocency; to be Wise, and hurt no body; to be Innocent, without being Silly? The other is, that of the Apostle, *be angry, and sin not.* How difficult is this, never to be angry but upon just Cause; and when the Cause of our anger is just, not to be transported

transported beyond due bounds, either as to the degree of our anger, or as to the duration and continuance of it? This is so very nice a Matter, that one would be almost tempted to think that this were in effect a prohibition of anger in any Case; *be ye angry, and sin not*; be ye so, if ye can, without Sin. I believe whosoever observes it, will find that it is as easie to suppress this Passion at any time, as to give way to it, without offending in one kind, or other. But to proceed,

How hard a Matter is it, To be much in Company, and free in Conversation, and not to be infected by it? To live in the midst of a wicked World, and yet to keep our selves free from the Vices of it? To be temperate in the use of things pleasing, so as neither to injure our Health, nor to lose the use of our Reason, nor to offend against Conscience? To Fast often, without being conceited of it, and bargaining as it were with God for some greater Liberties in another kind; and without censuring those who do not tie up themselves to our

strict Rules either of Piety or Abstinence? when perhaps they have neither the same Opportunities of doing it, nor the same Reason to do it that we have; nay perhaps have a much better Reason for not doing just as we do: For no Man is to prescribe to others his own private Method, either of Fasting, or of Devotion, as if he were the *Rule*, and his Example a kind of *Proclamation*, enjoying all his Neighbours the same days of Fasting and Prayer which he himself, for Reasons best known to himself, thinks fit to observe.

And then how hard is it to be cheerful, without being vain? and grave and serious, without being morose? to be useful and instructive to others, in our Conversation and Discourse, without assuming too much Authority to ourselves? which is not the best and most effectual way of doing good to others; there being something in the Nature of Man, which had rather take a hint and intimation from another, to advise himself, and would rather chuse to imitate the silent good Example  
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which they see in another, than to have either his Advice or his Example imposed upon them.

How difficult is it to have a Mind equal to every Condition, and to be content with mean and moderate things? to be Patient in Adversity, and Humble in Prosperity, and Meek upon sudden and violent Provocations? to keep our Passions free from getting head of our Reason, and our Zeal from out-running our Knowledge? to have a Will perfectly submitted and resigned to the Will of God, even when it lies cross and thwart to ours, so that whatever pleaseth God, should please us? to be Resolute, when our Duty happens to be difficult and dangerous; or even to believe that to be our Duty (tho' it certainly be so) which is very inconvenient for us to do? to hold out and be unwearied in well-doing? to be careful to preserve our Lives, and yet upon a great Occasion, and whenever God calls for them, to be content to lay them down?



To be *Wise* and *Innocent*; Men in *Understanding*, and yet in *Malice Children*? to have many great *Virtues*, and not to want that which gives the great lustre to them all, I mean real and unaffected *Modesty*, and *Humility*? In short,

How difficult is it, to have regard to all *God's Commandments*, and to hate every evil and false way? To have our Duty continually in our eye, and ready to be put in practice upon every proper Occasion? To have God, and the Consideration of another World, always before us, present to our Minds, and operative upon our Practice? To live as those that know they must die, and to have our thoughts perpetually awake, and intent upon the great and Everlasting Concernments of our Immortal Souls?

These are great things indeed, easie to be talkt of, but hard to be done; nay not to be done at all, without frequent and fervent Prayer to God, and the continual aids and supplies of his Grace;  
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not without an earnest endeavour on our parts, a vigorous resistance of Temptations, and many a sore conflict with our own perverse Wills and sensual Inclinations; not without a perpetual guard and watchfulness over our Lives, and our unruly Appetites and Passions.

Little do unexperienced Men, and those who have taken no great pains with themselves, imagine what Thought and Consideration, what Care and Attention, what Resolution and Firmness of Mind, what Diligence and *patient continuance in well-doing*, are requisite to make a truly good Man; such a one as St. Paul describes, that is *perfect and entire, and wanting nothing*; that follows God fully, and fulfils every part of his Duty, *having a Conscience void of offence towards God, and towards Man*. Who is there among us, that is either wise enough for his own direction, or good enough for the peace and satisfaction of his own Mind; that is so happy as to know his Duty, and to do it; as to have both the Understanding and the Will to do in all things as he ought?

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After our best Care, and all our Pains and Endeavours, the most of us will still find a great many defects in our Lives, and cannot but discern great and manifold imperfections in our very best Duties and Services; insomuch that we shall be forced to make the same acknowledgment concerning them, which *Solomon* does concerning the imperfection of all things under the Sun; *that which is crooked cannot be made streight, and that which is wanting cannot be numbred.* And when all is done, we have all of us reason to say, not only that we are *unprofitable servants, having done nothing but what was our duty to do*; but have cause likewise, with great shame and confusion of face, to acknowledge that we have been in many respects *Wicked and Slothful Servants*, and so very far from having done what was *our duty to do*, that the greatest part of the good which the most of us have done, is the least part of the good which we might and ought to have done.

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The Practice of Religion, in all the Parts and Instances of our Duty, is work more than enough for the best and greatest Mind, for the longest and best order'd Life. *The Commandment of God is exceeding broad*; and an Obedience in any good measure equal to the extent of it, extreamly difficult. And after all, as the Man in the Gospel said *with tears* to our Saviour, concerning the weakness of his own Faith, *Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief*, Mar. 9. 24. So the best of Men may say, and say it with *tears* too, concerning every Grace and Virtue wherein they excel most, "Lord, I aspire, I endeavour  
"after it, be thou pleased to assist my  
"weakness, and to help me by thy  
"grace continually to do better.

The Summ of all is this, If we be careful to do our best, and make it the constant and sincere endeavour of our Lives to please God, and to keep his Commandments, we shall be accepted of him: For God values this more than *whole Burnt-Offerings and Sacrifices*, more than *thousands of Rams, and ten thousands*

*sands of Rivers of Oil*; because this is an essential part of Religion, *To love God with all our hearts, and minds, and strength, and to love our Neighbours as our selves.* The Duties comprehended in these two great *Commandments*, sincerely practised by us (though with a great deal of imperfection) will certainly be acceptable in the sight of God, in and through the Merits and Mediation of *Jesus Christ the Righteous.* *Blessed are they* (saith St. John very plainly, in the conclusion of that obscure Book of his Revelation) *Blessed are they that do his Commandments, that they may have right to the Tree of Life, Rev. 22. 14.*

I speak now to a great many who are at the upper end of the World, and command all the Pleasures and Enjoyments of it; but the time is coming, and (whether we think of it or not) is very near at hand, when we shall see *an end of all perfection*, and of all that is desirable upon Earth, and upon which Men are apt to value themselves so much in this World; and then nothing but Religion, and the Conscience  
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of having done our Duty to God and Man, will stand us in stead, and yield true Comfort to us. When we are going to leave the World, how shall we then wish that we had made Religion the great business of our Lives ; and in the Day of God's Grace and Mercy, had exercised Repentance, and made our Peace with God, and prepared our selves for another World ; that after our departure hence, we might be admitted into *the presence of God, where is fulness of Joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore?*

Let no Man therefore, of what Rank or Condition soever he be in this World, think himself too great to be good, and too Wise to be Religious, and to take care of his Immortal Soul, and his Everlasting Happiness in another World ; since nothing but this will approve it self it to be *true Wisdom* at the last. All other things will have an end with this Life ; but Religion and the Fear of God is of a vast extent, and hath an influence upon our whole duration, and, after the course of this Life is ended, will put us into the secure



cure Possession of a Happiness which shall never have an end.

I will Conclude this whole Discourse with those words of our Blessed Saviour, *If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them. Which thou, who art the Eternal Spring of Truth and Goodness, grant that we may all know and do in this our day, for thy Mercies sake in Jesus Christ; to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all Honour and Glory, Dominion and Power, now and for ever. Amen.*

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*Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious Promises ; that by these ye might be partakers of the Divine Nature.*

**T**HE Connection of these words with the former is somewhat obscure, but it seems to be this. The Apostle had in the Verse before said, *that the Divine Power of Christ hath by the knowledge of the Gospel given us all things that pertain to Life and Godliness ;* that is, by the knowledge

knowledge of the *Gospel* we are furnish'd with all Advantages which conduce to make Men happy in the next Life, and Religious in this; and then it follows, *whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious Promises.* *Whereby*; this seems to refer to the whole of the foregoing Verse; as if it had been said, "Christ by the Gospel hath given to us all things that conduce to our Future Happiness; and in order thereto, all things which tend to make Men holy and good. Or else *Life and Godliness* are, by a *Hebraism* frequent in the New Testament, put for a *Godly Life*. And then among all those things which conduce to a Godly Life, the Apostle instanceth in the *Promises* of the Gospel, which do so directly tend to make Men *Partakers of a Divine Nature*.

In the handling of these words, I shall,

*First*, Consider the Promises here spoken of; *whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious Promises.*

*Secondly*,

Secondly, The influence which these Promises ought to have upon us ; *that by these ye might be made partakers of a Divine Nature.*

First, We will consider the Promises which are here spoken of ; *whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious Promises.* And because the chief Promises of the Gospel are here intended, I shall take occasion from this Text to handle the Doctrine of the Promises, which is frequently discours'd of in Divinity, but not always so clearly stated. And to this purpose, it will be proper to take into Consideration these four things.

1. What the Promises are which are here spoken of ; *whereby are given unto us Promises.*

2. Why they are said to be so great and precious ; *exceeding great and precious Promises.*

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3. We will Consider the Tenour of these Promises.

4. When Men are said to have a right to them, so as they may apply them to themselves. These *four* Heads will comprehend what I have to say upon this Argument.

1. What the Promises are which the Apostle here speaks of; *whereby are given unto us Promises*. And no doubt the Apostle here intends those great and excellent Promises which Christ hath made to us in the Gospel. So that to satisfy our selves in this enquiry, we need only to consider what are the Principal Promises of the Gospel. Now the great Promises of the Gospel are these *three*.

(1.) The Promise of the free Pardon and Forgiveness of our Sins, upon our Faith and Repentance.

(2.) The Promise of God's Grace and Holy Spirit to assist our Obedience.

(3.) The

(3.) The Promise of Eternal Life to Reward it.

(1.) The Promise of the Pardon and Forgiveness of our Sins upon our Faith and Repentance. The Gospel hath made full and clear Promises to this Purpose; that if we believe the Gospel, and will forsake our Sins, and amend our wicked Lives, all that is past shall be forgiven us, and that Christ died for this end, to obtain for us Remission of Sins in his Blood. The light of Nature, upon consideration of the Mercy and goodness of God, gave Men good hopes, that upon their Repentance God would forgive their sins, and turn away his wrath from them. But Mankind was doubtful of this, and therefore they used expiatory Sacrifices to appease the offended Deity. The Jewish Religion allowed of no Expiation, but for legal impurities, and involuntary transgressions, such as proceeded from ignorance and inadvertency; but not for *Sins of Presumption*, and such as were committed *with an high hand*. If Men sin'd wilfully, there



was no Sacrifice appointed by the Law for such Sins. But the Grace of the Gospel justifies us from the greatest Sins, upon our Faith and sincere Repentance. So St. Paul tells the Jews, *Acts 13. 38, 39. Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the Law of Moses.* There was no general Promise of Pardon, nor way of Expiation under the Law; perfect Remission of Sins is clearly revealed, and ascertain'd to us only by the Gospel.

(2.) Another great Promise of the Gospel is the Promise of God's Grace and Holy Spirit to assist our Obedience. Our Blessed Saviour hath promised, that *our Heavenly Father will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask him.* 'Tis true indeed, there was a peculiar Promise of the Holy Ghost to the Apostles and Christians of the first Ages, which is not now to be expected; namely, an Extraordinary and Miraculous Power, whereby they were qualified

fied to publish the Gospel to the World, and to give Confirmation to it. But now that the Christian Religion is propagated and settled in the World, the great End and Use of these Miraculous Gifts is ceased: but yet the Spirit of God doth still concur with the Gospel, and work upon the Minds of Men, to excite and assist them to that which is good. And tho' this Operation be very secret, so as we cannot give an account of the manner of it, yet the effects of it are very sensible, and this influence of God's Holy Spirit is common to all Christians in all Ages of the World. This Proposition is Universally true, and in all Ages and Times; *If any Man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.*

It must be acknowledged, that the Spirit doth not now work upon Men in that sudden and sensible manner, as it did in the first times of Christianity; because then Men were strongly possessed with the prejudices of other Religions, which they had been brought up in; and therefore as more outward means of Conviction were then neces-

sary, so likewise a more powerful internal Operation of the Spirit of God upon the Minds of Men, to Conquer and bear down those prejudices, and to subdue them to the Obedience of Faith. But now the Principles of Religion and Goodness are more gradually instilled into the Minds of Men, by the gentle degrees of Pious Instruction and Education; and with these means the Spirit of God concurs in a more Humane way, which is more suited and accommodated to our Reason, and offers less violence to the Nature of Men. So that this Promise of God's Holy Spirit is now made good to us, as the Necessity and Circumstances of our present State do require. God does not use such extraordinary Means for the producing of those Effects, which may be accomplish'd in a more ordinary way. The assistance of God's Holy Spirit is still necessary to Men, to encline and enable them to that which is good; but not in that manner and degree that it was necessary at first: Because the prejudices against Christianity are not now so great, and many of those Advantages which were necessarily

ly wanting at first, are now supplied in an ordinary way ; and therefore it is not reasonable now to expect the same extraordinary operation of the Spirit of God upon the Minds of Men, which we read of in the first beginnings of Christianity.

(3.) There is likewise the Promise of Eternal Life to Reward and Crown our Obedience. And this the Scripture speaks of, as the great Promise of the Gospel, 1 *Job.* 2. 25. *This is the promise which he hath promised us, even Eternal Life.* And upon this account the new Covenant of the Gospel is preferred before the old Covenant of the Law, because it is *establish'd upon better Promises.* All the Special and Particular Promises of the Law were of Temporal good things, and these were the great Encouragements that were given to Obedience, under that imperfect Dispensation : but now *Godliness hath not only the Promise of the Life that now is, but of that which is to come ;* as the Apostle tells us, 1 *Tim.* 4. 8. The Gospel hath clearly revealed to us a happy State of Immortality after this Life, of which Men had but

very obscure and doubtful apprehensions. So the same Apostle tells us, *2 Tim. 1. 10. That it is now made manifest, by the appearance of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished Death, and hath brought Life and Immortality to light, through the Gospel.* Holy Men had good hopes of it before; but they had no sure distinct apprehensions of it, no such full assurance concerning it, no such clear and expresse Promises of it, as the Gospel hath given us.

Thus you see what those great Promises are which the Gospel hath given us, namely, the Promise of the Free Pardon and Forgiveness of our Sins, upon our Faith and Repentance; the Promise of God's Grace and Holy Spirit to assist our Obedience, and the Promise of Eternal Life and Happiness to Reward it. These are the *three* Eminent Promises of the Gospel, and in all probability those which the Apostle here calls *great and precious Promises*, which brings me to the

*Second Thing* which I propounded to Consider, namely, why they are said



said to be exceeding great and precious ;  
 τὰ μέγιστα καὶ τίμια ἐπαγγέλματα, the  
 greatest and the most valuable Promises.  
 And to satisfy us that they are  
 such, the very Consideration of the  
 Blessings and Benefits that they carry  
 in them will be sufficient. If we  
 Consider the Condition that Mankind  
 was in, when God was pleased to  
 make these gracious Declarations to  
 us, we shall see great Reason to set a  
 high value upon every one of these  
 Promises. Mankind was extremely de-  
 generated, *all Flesh had corrupted its  
 ways,* and *the whole World was guilty  
 before God,* and liable to all that Mi-  
 sery which the Sinner had reason to  
 apprehend from the incensed Justice  
 of the Almighty. We had forfeited  
 that Happiness to which our Immor-  
 tal Nature was designed, and, which  
 made our Condition more sad, we  
 were *without strength* to recover our  
 selves out of it, by our Repentance  
 for what was past (if God would have  
 accepted of it) and by our Future  
 Obedience. Now the Promises of the  
 Gospel offer Relief to us in all these  
 Respects, and thereby obviate all the  
 difficulties



difficulties and discouragements which Mankind lay under.

The gracious Promise of Pardon frees us from guilt, and secures us from the terrible wrath of God, which our guilty Consciences did so much dread; and without this Promise, Mankind would have been under the greatest doubts and discouragements. For when Men are afraid *their Sins are greater than will be forgiven them*, they are apt to fall into Despair, and Despair is an effectual bar to Repentance; for when Men think their Condition is desperate, they care not what they do.

And the Promise of God's Grace and Holy Spirit, to assist and enable us to do our Duty, does fully answer all the Discouragements and Objections from our own weakness, and the power of temptation. We may *do all things through Christ strengthening us*; and how weak soever we are of our selves, we are *strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might*. If God be for us, who or what can stand against us? The Devil

Devil is a very powerful Enemy, and much too strong for Flesh and Blood to Encounter in its own strength; but there is another Principle in the World, which is Mightier and more Powerful than he, the Holy Spirit of God, who is always ready to help, when we do not repulse and refuse his assistance; *Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the World*, says the Apostle, 1 Joh. 4. 4. The Spirit of God dwells in all those who are willing to admit him, and is ever ready to assist those who comply with his blessed Motions, and do vigorously put forth their own endeavours.

And then the Promise of Eternal Life, *that* answers all the difficulties of our Obedience, and sets us above any thing that the World can threaten us withal, for our Constancy to God, and his Truth. A Wise Man will be content to suffer any thing, or to quit any thing upon terms of far greater advantage: And what greater Consideration can be offered to encourage our Constancy and Obedience, than an Eternity of Happiness?  
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So that the Apostle had Reason to call these *exceeding great and valuable Promises*; so valuable, that if any one of them had been wanting, our Redemption and Recovery had either been absolutely impossible, or extreamly difficult. I proceed to the

*Third* thing I propounded, which was to consider the Tenour of these Promises; that is, whether God have made them absolutely to us, without requiring any thing to be done on our part, or upon certain Terms and Conditions to be performed by us. That God may (if he please) make an Absolute Promise of any Blessing or Benefit to us, there is no doubt; and that God's grace does prevent many, and is beforehand with them, is as little to be doubted; the Spirit of God goes along with the Gospel, moving and inclining Men to yield Obedience to it, many times before any inclination and disposition thereto on their parts. But as to this Promise of God's Grace and Holy Spirit, the great question is not about the first motion of it, but the continuance of this assistance,

sistance, and the encrease of it ; and this, I think may safely be affirmed, is promised only Conditionally, as also the Pardon of Sin, and Eternal Life. And concerning each of these, the Matter may quickly be decided, by plain Texts of Scripture.

Concerning the Promise of the grace and assistance of God's Holy Spirit, the Scripture takes notice of *two* Conditions. *First*, that we beg it earnestly of God : And this our Saviour expresseth by *asking, seeking, and knocking*, which signifies the importunity of our Requests ; *Our Heavenly Father will give his Holy Spirit to them that thus ask it.* And then *Secondly*, That we improve and make use of the grace which God affords us ; *To him that hath, shall be given, and from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he seems to have.* That is (as appears plainly from the scope of the Parable) to him that useth that grace, and those advantages which God affords him, more shall be given ; but from him that makes no use of them, and therefore is as if he had them not,

not, shall be taken away that which he but seems to have, because he makes no use of it.

Concerning the Pardon of Sins ; The Scripture plainly suspends that upon the general Condition of Repentance, and the change of our Lives ; *Repent, that your Sins may be forgiven you* : And upon the Condition of our forgiving others ; *If ye forgive Men their Trespases, then will your Heavenly Father also forgive you ; but if ye forgive not Men their Trespases, neither will your Father forgive your Trespases*, says our Saviour, *Mat. 6. 14, 15.*

And then the Promise of Eternal Life, is every where in Scripture suspended upon the Condition of Faith and Repentance, and Perseverance in well doing. *He that believes* (says our Saviour) *shall be saved*, which indeed implies the whole Condition of the Gospel. *He that Believes* ; that is, he that effectually assents to the Doctrine of Christ, and is so perswaded of the truth of it, as to live according to it, *shall be saved*. But if Obedience were  
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not included in the Scripture Notion of Faith, yet the Scripture elsewhere expressly makes it the Condition of our Eternal Salvation. *Heb. 5. 9.* Christ is there said to be *the Author of Eternal Salvation to them that obey him*; thereby implying, that none shall be saved by Christ, but those that obey the Gospel. *Heb. 12. 14.* *Follow Holiness, without which no Man shall see the Lord.* *Rom. 2. 7, 8, 9.* *To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for Glory, and Honour, and Immortality, God will give Eternal Life; but to them who are contentious, and obey not the Truth, that is, the Gospel, but obey Unrighteousness; Indignation, and Wrath, Tribulation and Anguish upon every Soul of man that doth Evil.*

I cannot well imagine what can reasonably be answered to such plain Texts; but I will tell you what is commonly answered; namely, That God gives the Condition which he requires; and therefore though these Promises run in a Conditional Form, yet in truth they are absolute; because he that makes a Promise to another,  
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upon a Condition which he will also perform, doth in effect make an absolute Promise. As if a Man promised another such an Estate, upon Condition he pay such a Summ for it, and does promise withal to furnish him with that Summ, this in effect amounts to an absolute Promise of the Estate.

And this is very well argued, if the Case were thus. But God hath no where promised to work the Condition in us, without the concurrence of our own Endeavours. God may, and oftentimes doth prevent Men by his Grace; but he hath no where promised to *give his Holy Spirit, but to them that ask it of him.* And he hath no where promised to continue his grace and assistance to us, unless we will use our sincere Endeavours; nay in case we do not, he hath threatned to take away his grace and assistance from us. And if this be so, then the Promises of the Gospel do not only *seem* to be Conditional, but are *really* so. And it is a wonder that any Man should doubt of this; who considers  
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how frequently in the New Testament the Gospel is represented to us under the notion of a *Covenant*, since a *Covenant* in the very nature of it doth imply a mutual Obligation between the Parties that enter into it. But if the Gospel contain only Blessings which are promised on God's part, without any thing required to be done and performed on our part, in order to the obtaining of those Blessings, then the Gospel is nothing else but a *Promise*, or *Deed of Gift*, making over certain Benefits and Blessings to us; but can in no propriety of Language in the World be called a *Covenant*: But if there be some things required on our part, in order to our being made partakers of the Promises which God hath made to us (as the Scripture every where tells us there is) then the Promises are plainly *Conditional*. To instance in the Promise of Forgiveness of Sins; *Repent, that your Sins may be blotted out*; that is, upon this Condition that ye Repent of your Sins, they shall be forgiven; and not otherwise. Can there be any plainer Condition in the World, than is in those Words of our Saviour? *If ye forgive Men their Trespases, your Heavenly Fa-*  
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*ther will also forgive your Trespases; but if ye forgive not Men their Trespases, neither will your Heavenly Father forgive your Trespases.*

This is so far from being any prejudice to the freeness of Gods grace, who is infinitely gracious in offering such great Blessings to us upon any Condition that we can perform; yet it were one of the absurdest things in the World, to imagine that God should grant to Men forgiveness of Sins, and Eternal Life, let them behave themselves as they Will.

*Fourthly,* The last thing I proposed for the explaining of this Doctrine of the Promises of God, was, to consider when Men may be said to have a right to these Promises, so as to be able upon good grounds to apply them to themselves? And the Answer to this is very plain and easie; namely, when they find the Conditions of these Promises in themselves; and not till then.

When a Man hath truly repented of his Sins, so as to forsake them, and lead a new Life; and when he does from his heart forgive those that have offended him, and hath laid down all animosity

animosity against them, and thoughts of Revenge, then hath he a right to the Promise of Pardon and Forgiveness, and may apply to himself in particular what the Scripture saith in general, that *God will blot out all his Transgressions, and remember his Iniquities no more.* When a Man doth constantly and earnestly implore the assistance of God's Holy Spirit, and is ready to yield to the motions of it, and does faithfully make use of that strength and assistance which God affords him, then he may expect the continuance of his grace, and further degrees of it. When a Man makes it the constant and sincere endeavour of his Life, to please God, and to *walk in all the Ordinances and Commandments of the Lord blameless,* and is effectually taught by the grace of God to *deny ungodliness, and worldly lusts, and to live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present World,* then he may with comfort and joy wait for the *blessed hope, and the glorious appearance of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ;* then he may with confidence depend upon God, in *sure and certain hope of that Eternal Life, which God, that*

*cannot lie, hath promised. When he can say with St. Paul, I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith, then he may likewise triumph, as he did, henceforth there is laid up for me a Crown of Righteousness, which God the Righteous Judge shall give me in that day.*

Upon these terms, and in these Cases, Men may upon good grounds apply to themselves these *exceeding great and precious Promises* of the Gospel; and so far as any Man is doubtful and uncertain of the performance of the Conditions which the Gospel requires, so far he must necessarily question his Right and Title to the Blessings promised. And if any Man think this Doctrine too uncomfortable, and be willing to reject it upon this account, I shall only say this, that Men may cheat themselves, if they please, but most certainly they will never find any true and solid Comfort in any other. This is a plain and sensible account of a Mans Confidence and good hopes in the Promises of God; but for a Man to apply any Promise to himself, before he finds  
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the Condition in himself, is not *Faith*, but either *Fancy*, or *Presumption*.

And therefore it is a very preposterous course which many take, to advise and exhort Men, with so much earnestness, to apply the Promises of God to themselves, and to tell them that they are guilty of great unbelief in not doing it. That which is proper to exhort Men to, is to endeavour to perform the Condition upon which God hath promised any Blessing to us; and when Men find the Condition in themselves, they will without any great perswasion take Comfort from the Promise, and apply it to themselves; but till they discern the Condition in themselves, it is impossible for a Man that understands himself, to apply the Promise to himself; for till the Condition be performed, he hath no more right to the Promise, than if such a Promise had never been made. And 'tis so far from being a Sin in such a Man, to doubt of the benefit of such a Promise, that it is his Duty to do so; and no Man that understands himself, and the

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Promises of God, can possibly do otherwise.

Therefore 'tis a vain and groundless trouble which perplexeth many People, that they cannot apply the Promises of God to themselves; whereas the true ground of their trouble should be this, that they have not been careful to perform the Condition of those Promises which they would apply to themselves; the other is an endless trouble; let them but look to the Condition, and the Promise will apply it self. I speak all this on purpose to free Men from those perplexities where-with many have entangled themselves, by false apprehensions of the Promises of God, either as if they were not made to us upon certain Conditions to be performed by us, or as if any Man could comfortably apply them to himself, before he hath performed those Conditions upon which God hath made such Promises. For if Men will believe that which is not true, or expect things upon such terms as they are not to be had, they may trouble themselves Eternally, and all the World cannot help it.

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I have now done with the *First* thing I propounded to speak to, namely the Promises which are here spoken of. The *Second* thing, (*viz.*) what Influence these Promises ought to have upon us, *that by them we may be made Partakers of a Divine Nature*, I shall reserve to another Opportunity.

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*Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious Promises ; that by these ye might be partakers of the Divine Nature.*

**I** Made entrance into these words the last Day, in the handling whereof I proposed to do these *two* things.

*First, To consider the Promises here spoken of ; Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious Promises.*

*Secondly,*

*Secondly, The Influence which these Promises ought to have upon us ; that by these ye might be partakers of a Divine Nature.*

The *first* of these I have done with, and proceed now to the

*Second, viz. The Influence which these Promises ought to have upon us ; Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious Promises, that by these ye might be partakers of a Divine Nature. Not that we can partake of the Essence and Nature of God, as some have blasphemously affirmed, pretending, in their canting and senseless Language, to be Godded with God, and Christed with Christ. In this sense it is impossible for us to partake of the Divine Nature ; for this would be for Men to become Gods, and to be advanced to the State and Perfection of the Deity. But the word Φύσις doth frequently in Scripture signify a temper and disposition ; and to be partakers of a Divine Nature, is to be of a Divine Temper and Disposition, to have our Corrupt Natures rectified and purged*

ged from all sinful Lusts, and irregular Passions, and from all Vicious and Corrupt Affections; and therefore it follows in the Text, *having escaped the Corruption that is in the World through Lust; and besides this, giving all diligence, add to your Faith Virtue, and to Virtue Knowledge, and to Knowledge Temperance, and to Temperance Patience, and to Patience Godliness, and to Godliness Brotherly-kindness, and to Brotherly-kindness Charity.* So that we are made partakers of a Divine Nature, as the Apostle here explains it, these two ways; by cleansing our selves from the Lusts of the Flesh, which the Apostle here calls the *corruption or defilement which is in the World through Lust*; and by a diligent endeavour after all Christian Graces, and Virtues, Faith, and Temperance, and Patience, a sincere love of the Brethren, and an Universal Charity and goodwill towards all Men.

And that this is the proper influence and efficacy of the great Promises of the Gospel upon the hearts and lives of Men, the Apostle St. Paul fully declares



clares to us, 2 Cor. 7. 1. *Having therefore these Promises, Dearly Beloved, let us cleanse our selves from all filthiness of the Flesh, and Spirit; that is, from the lusts of the Flesh, and of uncleanness, and from all evil and corrupt affections of the Mind, such as Wrath, Envy, Malice, Hatred, Strife, Revenge, Cruelty, Pride, and the like; perfecting holiness in the fear of God; that is, continually aspiring still more and more after further degrees of Holiness, and Virtue, and goodness, which are the great Perfections of the Divine Nature. And thus by a constant and sincere endeavour to cleanse our selves from all impurity of Flesh and Spirit, and by practising all the Virtues of a good Life, we shall by degrees raise and advance our selves to a Godlike temper and disposition, imitating in all our Actions the Goodness, and Mercy, and Patience, and Truth, and Faithfulness of God, and all those other Perfections of the Divine Nature, which are comprehended under the term of Holiness. This is that which the Apostle here calls partaking of a Divine Nature; or, as our Blessed Saviour*

Saviour expresseth it, *to be perfect, as our Father which is in Heaven is perfect.*

This the Gospel designs to raise us to; and one of the great Instruments whereby this is effected, are those *exceeding great and precious Promises* which I have insisted upon: And they are capable of effecting it these *two* ways.

*First*, By way of internal Efficacy and Assistance; and,

*Secondly*, By way of external Motive and Argument: Both these ways, some or other of these Promises have a mighty influence upon us (if we be not wanting to our selves) to raise us to a Godlike temper and disposition, that is, to the greatest perfection of Virtue and Goodness which we are capable of in this Life.

*First*, By way of internal Efficacy and Assistance. And this influence the Promise of God's Holy Spirit, and of the gracious help and assistance thereof,

of, hath upon the Minds of Men, inclining them to that which is good, and enabling them to do it. For the Holy Spirit is promised to us, in consideration and commiseration of that impotency and weakness which we have contracted in that degenerate and depraved Condition into which Mankind is sunk; to help us, who are *without strength* to recover our selves, out of that evil and miserable state into which by wilful transgression we are fallen; to *quicken us who are dead in Trespasses and Sins*, (as the Scripture expresseth the Condition of unregenerate Persons) to *raise us to a new Life*, and to cherish this Principle of Spiritual Life, which is commonly weak at first, and to carry it through alldiscouragements and oppositions; to excite us continually to our Duty, and to enable us to the most difficult parts of Obedience, such as are most contrary to our natural inclinations, and against the grain of flesh and blood, to bear down the strength of Sin and Temptation; and in all our Conflicts with the World, and the Flesh, the Devil, and all the Powers of Darkness, to  
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make us victorious over them ; and, in a word, to be a Principle within us, more mighty and powerful than the Lusts and Inclinations of our evil Hearts, than the most obstinate and inveterate habits of Sin and Vice, and than all the Temptations and Terrors of sense. So that if we will make use of this assistance, and lay hold of this strength which God affords us in the Gospel, and (as the Apostle expresseth it) *be workers together with God*, we need not despair of Victory and Success ; for our strength will continually encrease, and the force and violence of our Lusts will be abated, God will give us more grace, and we shall *walk from strength to strength*, and *our path will be* (as Solomon says of *the way of the Righteous*) *as the light which shines more and more unto the perfect day.*

For the Holy Spirit of God conducts and manageth this great work of our Sanctification and Salvation from first to last, by opening our Hearts to let in the light of Divine Truth upon our Minds, by representing

ing to us with advantage such Arguments and Considerations as are apt to perswade us to embrace it, and yield to it ; by secret and gentle reprehensions, softning our hard hearts, and bending our stiff and stubborn Wills to a compliance with the Will of God, and our Duty. And this is that great Work which the Scripture calls our *Regeneration*, and *Sanctification*, *the turning us from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, a new Creation, and a Resurrection from the Death of Sin, to the Life of Holiness.* And then by leading and directing us in the ways of Holiness and Obedience; by quickning our Devotion, and stirring up in us Holy Desires and Dispositions of Soul, rendring us fit to draw near to God in Prayer, with a due sense of our own wants and unworthiness, and an humble Confidence in the goodness of God, that he will grant us those good things that we ask of him ; in supporting and comforting us in all our Afflictions and Sufferings, especially for Truth and Righteousness sake ; and by Sealing and Confirming to us the Blessed Hopes  
of

of Eternal Life. Thus the Spirit of God carries on the Work of our Sanctification, and makes us *Partakers of a Divine Nature*, by way of inward efficacy and assistance.

*Secondly*, The Promises of the Gospel are apt likewise to have a mighty influence upon us by way of Motive and Argument, to engage and encourage us to *cleanse our selves from all filthiness of flesh and Spirit, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God*. For,

*First*, A full Pardon and Indemnity for what is past, is a mighty encouragement for us to return to our Duty, and a forcible Argument to keep us to it for the future. For since God, who hath been so highly injured and affronted by us, is so willing and ready to forgive us, as not only to provide and purchase for us the Means of our Pardon, by the grievous Sufferings of his dear Son, but to offer it so freely, and invite us so earnestly to accept of it, and to be reconciled to him; the Consideration of this ought in all Reason, Ingenuity, and Gratitude, to

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melt us into Sorrow and Repentance for our Sins, and a deep sense of the evil of them, and to enflame our hearts with a mighty love to God, and our blessed Redeemer, *who hath loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood*; And to make us extreamly unwilling, nay most firmly resolved never more to offend that merciful and gracious God, who is so slow to punish, and so forward to forgive; and effectually to engage us to a dutiful and constant and chearful Obedience to God's holy Laws and Commandments, lest by our wilful transgression and violation of them, we should run our selves into a deeper guilt, and aggravate our Condemnation. Now that by the tender Mercies of our God we are *made whole*, we should be infinitely afraid *to sin any more, lest worse things come to us*; lest we relapse into a more incurable state, and bring a heavier load of guilt and misery upon our selves.

*Secondly*, The Promise of God's Grace and Holy Spirit is likewise a very powerful Argument and Encouragement to Holiness, and Goodness,  
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engaging us *to cleanse our selves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit*, that our Souls and Minds may be a fit Temple for the Holy Ghost, which will not dwell in an impure Soul: And likewise Encouraging us hereto, by this Consideration, that we have so unerring a Guide to Counsel and Direct us, so Powerful an Assistant *to strengthen us with all might in the Inner Man*, to stand by us in all our Conflicts with Sin and Satan, and to make us (as the Apostle expresseth it) *more than Conquerours* over all our Spiritual Enemies. For tho' we be weak, and our Lusts strong, our Enemies many, and Temptations mighty and violent; yet we need not be disheartned, so long as we know that *God is with us*, and *the Grace of his Holy Spirit sufficient for us*, against all the strength of Sin, and Hell; tho' our Duty be hard, and our strength small, yet we cannot fail of success, if we be sure that the Omnipotent grace of God is always ready to second our sincere, tho' never so weak, Endeavours. So that when we see all the Enemies of our Salvation drawn up in array against us, we

may encourage our selves, as the Prophet *Eliſha* did his Servant, when he told him that *an Hoſt compaſſed the City with Horſes and Chariots*, and ſaid, *Alas ! my Maſter, how ſhall we do ?* And he answered, *fear not, for they that be with us, are more than they that be with them,* 2 *King.* 6. 16. Or, as *Hezekiah* Comforted the People, when they were afraid of the mighty force of the King of *Aſſyria*, 2 *Chron.* 32. 7, 8. *Be ſtrong and courageous, be not afraid nor diſmayed for the King of Aſſyria, nor for all the multitude that is with him : For there be more with us, than with him. With him is an arm of fleſh, but with us is the Lord our God, to help us, and to fight for us.* This is the Caſe of every Chriſtian ; the force that is againſt us is finite and limited ; but the Almighty God is on our ſide, and fights for us ; and every one of us may ſay with *St. Paul*, *Philip.* 4. 13. *I can do all things through Chriſt which ſtrengtheneth me.*

Thirdly, The Promise of Eternal Life and Happineſs, if duly weighed and conſidered, hath a mighty force in it  
to

to take us off from the Love and Practice of Sin, and to encourage our Obedience, and *patient continuance in well-doing*. The assurance of enjoying unspeakable and endless Happiness in another World, and of escaping extremam and eternal Misery, is a Consideration of that weight, as one would think could not fail of its efficacy upon us, to put all temptations to Sin out of countenance, and to bear down before us all the difficulties and discouragements in the way of our Duty. And if this make no impression upon us, if Heaven and Hell be of no weight with us, it will be in vain to use any other Arguments, which in Comparison of this, are *but as the very small dust upon the balance*. For if on the one hand the hopes of perfect Comfort, and Joy, and Felicity, perpetual in duration, and vast beyond all imagination, *such as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath entred into the heart of Man to conceive*: And if on the other hand, the dread of the terrible wrath of God, and of the vengeance of Eternal Fire, together with the insupportable torments of a guilty *Conscience*, and

the perpetual stings of bitter remorse and anguish for the wilful folly of our wicked Lives, and the rage of horrible despair of ever getting out of so miserable a State ; If neither of these Considerations, if both of them will not prevail upon us to *cease to be evil*, and to *resolve to be good*, that we may obtain one of these Conditions, and may escape the other ; there is no hope that any words that can be used, any Arguments and Considerations that can be offered, should work upon us, or take place with us. He that is not to be tempted by such hopes, nor to be terrified by such fears, is proof against all the force of persuasion in the World.

And thus I have done with the *two* things which I proposed to consider from these words ; the Nature of these *Promises*, and the Influence they are apt, and ought to have upon us, to raise us to the perfection of Virtue and Goodness, which the Apostle here calls our being *Partakers of a Divine Nature*. All that now remains is, to make some  
useful

useful Reflections upon what hath been discoursed upon these *two* Heads.

*First* of all, If we expect the Blessings and Benefits of these *exceeding great and precious Promises* of the Gospel, we must be careful to perform the Conditions which are indispensably required on our parts. It is a great mistake, and of very pernicious consequence to the Souls of Men, to imagine that the Gospel is all Promises on God's part; and that our part is only to believe them, and to rely upon *God* for the performance of them, and to be very confident that he will make them good, tho' we do nothing else but only believe that he will do so. That the Christian Religion is only a Declaration of God's good will to us, without any expectation of Duty from us; this is an Error which one could hardly think could ever enter into any who have the liberty to read the Bible, and do attend to what they read, and find there.



The *Three* great Promises of the Gospel are all very expressly contain'd in our Saviour's first Sermon upon the Mount. There we find the Promise of *Blessedness* often repeated ; but never absolutely made, but upon Certain Conditions, and plainly required on our parts ; As Repentance, Humility, Righteousness, Mercy, Peaceableness, Meekness, Patience. *Forgiveness of Sins* is likewise Promised ; but only to those that make a Penitent acknowledgment of them, and ask Forgiveness for them, and are ready to grant that Forgiveness to others, which they beg of God for themselves. *The gift of God's Holy Spirit* is likewise there Promised ; but it is upon Condition of our earnest and importunate Prayer to God. The Gospel is every where full of Precepts, enjoying Duty and Obedience on our part, as well as of Promises on God's part, assuring Blessings to us ; nay of terrible threatnings also, if we disobey the Precepts of the Gospel. *St. Paul* gives us the summ of the Gospel in very few and plain words,

words, declaring upon what terms we may expect that Salvation which the Gospel offers to all Men, *Tit. 2. 11, 12, 13, 14. The grace of God which bringeth Salvation hath appeared to all Men; teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly Lusts, we should live soberly, and righteously, and godly in this present world, looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purifie unto himself a peculiar People, zealous of good works.* And then he adds, *These things speak and exhort, and rebuke with all authority;* Intimating, that tho' Men were very averſe to this Doctrine, it ought to be inculcated with great Authority and Earnestness, and those who opposed and despised it, to be severely rebuked: And with great Reason, because the contrary Doctrine does most effectually undermine and defeat the whole Design of the Christian Religion.

*Secondly,*

*Secondly*, From hence we learn, that if the Promises of the Gospel have not this effect upon us, to make us *Partakers of a Divine Nature*, it is our own fault, and because we are wanting to our selves. God is always ready to do his part; if we do not fail in ours. There is a Divine Power and Efficacy goes along with the Gospel, to make way for the entertainment of it in the hearts of Men, where they put no bar and obstacle to it. But if Men will resist the Motions of God's Blessed Spirit, and quench the light of it, and obstinately hold out against the force of Truth; God will withdraw his Grace and Holy Spirit from them. The Gospel would raise us to the perfection of all virtue and goodness; and the Promises of it are admirably fitted to relieve the infirmities and weakness of Humane Nature, and to *renew us after the Image of God, in Righteousness, and true Holiness*; to take us off from Sin and Vice, and to allure us to Goodness; and to assist and encourage us in the practice of it: But if we will not comply with the  
gracious

gracious Design of God in the Gospel, and suffer these Promises to have their due influence and efficacy upon us; we wilfully deprive our selves of all the Blessings and Benefits of it, *we reject the Counsel of God against our selves,* and *receive the Grace of God in vain*; and by rejecting and despising his Promises, we provoke him to execute his Threatnings upon us.

*Thirdly,* and Lastly, If the Promises of the Christian Religion are apt in their own Nature to work this great effect upon us, to make us like to God, and to bring us to so near a resemblance of the Divine Perfections, to make us Good, and Just, and Merciful, and Patient, and *Holy in all manner of Conversation, to purge us from our Iniquities,* and *to make us a Peculiar and Excellent People, zealous of good works*; I say if this be the proper tendency of the Gospel, and the Promises of it, how doth this upbraid the degenerate state of the Christian World at this day? which does so abound in all kind of Wickedness and Impiety; so that we may cry  
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out as he did, upon reading the Gospel; *Profecto aut hoc non est Evangelium; aut nos non sumus Evangelici;* "Either this is not the Gospel which we read, and the Christian Religion which we profess; or we are no Christians. We are so far from that pitch of goodness and Virtue which the Christian Religion is apt to raise Men to, and which the Apostle here calls *the Divine Nature*, that a great part of us are degenerated into Beasts and Devils, wallowing in abominable and filthy Lusts, indulging our selves in those Devilish Passions of Malice and Hatred, of Strife and Discord, of Revenge and Cruelty, of Sedition, and Disturbance of the Publick Peace, to that degree, as if *the Grace of God* had never appeared to us *to teach* us the contrary. And therefore it concerns all those who have the face to call themselves Christians, to demean themselves at another rate, and for the Honour of their Religion, and the Salvation of their own Souls, *to have their Conversation as becometh the Gospel of Christ;* and by departing from the Vicious practices

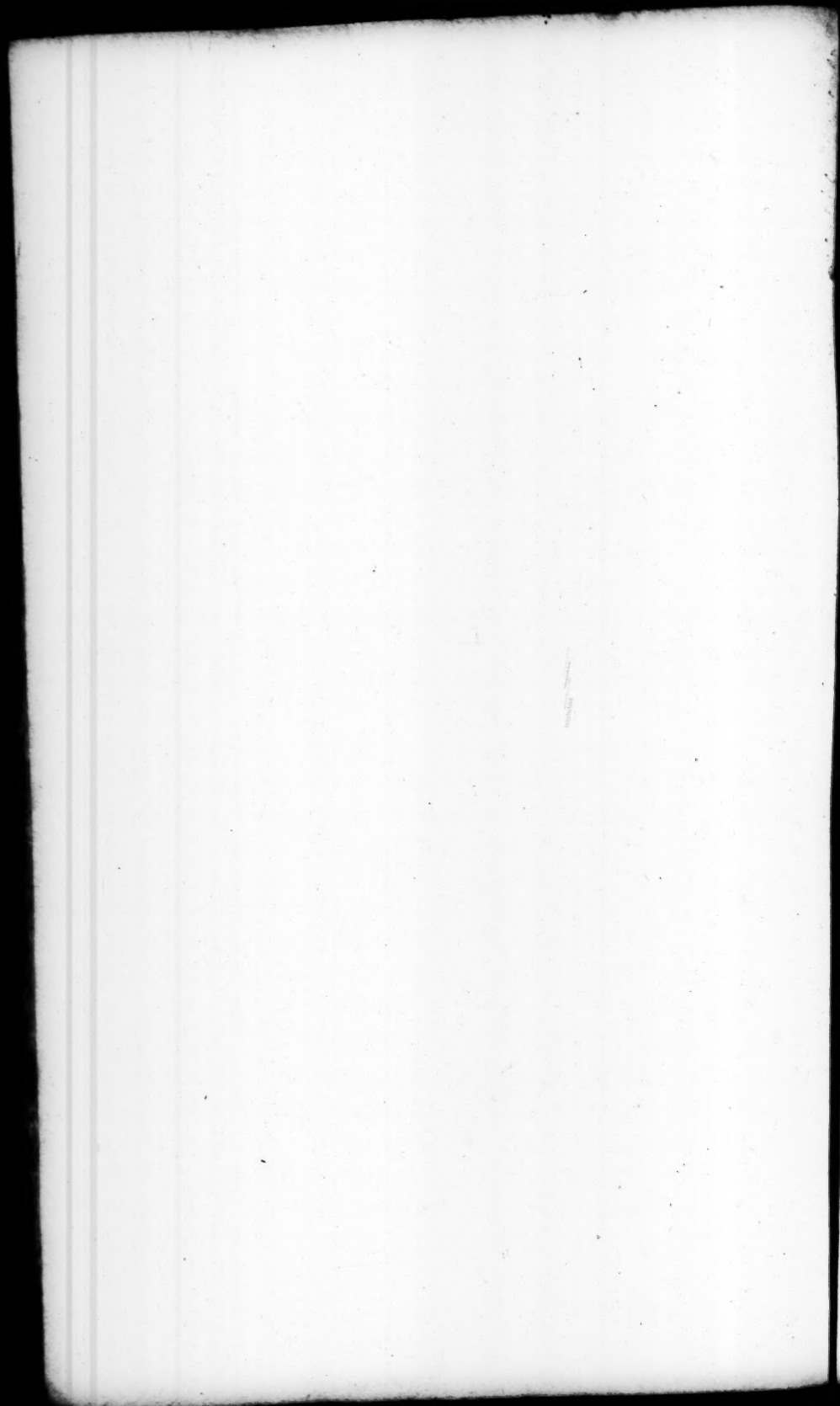
Etices of this present Evil World, to do what in them lies to prevent the Judgments of God which hang over us; or if they cannot do that, *to save themselves from this untoward Generation.*

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I P E T E R I V. 19.

*Wherefore, let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their Souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.*

**T**HIS Epistle was written by St. Peter, who was the Apostle of the Circumcision, to the dispersed Jews, who were newly Converted to Christianity; And the Design of it is to Confirm and Establish them in the Profession of it; and to instruct

instruct them how they ought to demean themselves towards the Heathen or Gentiles, among whom they lived; and more particularly to arm and prepare them for those Sufferings and Persecutions, which he foretels would shortly overtake them for the Profession of Christianity; that when they should happen, they might not be surpris'd and startled at them, as if some strange and unexpected thing were come upon them; at the 12 v. of this Chapter, *Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery Tryal which is to try you; that is, do not wonder and be not astonish'd at it, as if some strange thing hapned unto you.*

And then he instructs them more particularly, how they ought to behave themselves under those Trials and Sufferings, when they should happen; not only with Patience, which men ought to exercise under all kinds of Sufferings, upon what Account and Cause soever; but with Joy and Cheerfulness; considering the Glorious Example and Reward of them, v. 13. *but rejoyce, in as much as ye are partakers*

kers of Christs Sufferings; that when his Glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding Joy: And at the 14. ver. he tells them, that besides the Encouragement of so great an Example, and so glorious a Reward, they should be supported and assisted in a very extraordinary manner, by the Spirit of God resting upon them in a glorious manner, as a Testimony of the Divine Power and Presence with them; v. 14. *If ye be reproached for the Name of Christ, happy are ye, for the Spirit of Glory and of God resteth upon you; or, as it is in the best Copies, for the Spirit of Glory and of Power, even the Spirit of God resteth upon you;* that is, the Glorious Power of the Divine Spirit is present with you, to comfort and bear up your Spirits under these Sufferings. But then he cautions them, to take great Care, that their Sufferings be for a good Cause, and a good Conscience; v. 15. *But let none of you suffer as a Murtherer, or as a Thief, or as an evil-doer, (that is, as an Offender in any kind against Human Laws, made to preserve the Peace and good Order of the World)*

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or as a busy-body in other mens matters; (that is, as a pragmatistical Person, that meddles out of his own Sphere, to the Disquiet and Disturbance of Human Society :) For to suffer upon any of these Accounts, would be matter of Shame and Trouble, but not of Joy and Comfort: But if they suffer'd upon Account of the Profession of Christianity, this would be no Cause of Shame and Reproach to them; but they ought rather to give God Thanks for calling them to suffer in so good a Cause, and upon so glorious an Account. V. 16. *Yet if any man suffer as a Christian (if that be his only Crime) let him not be ashamed, but let him glorifie God on this behalf; for the time is come, that Judgment must begin at the House of God; (that is, the wise and just Providence of God, hath so order'd it at this Time, for very good Reasons and Ends, that the first Calamities and Sufferings should fall upon Christians, the peculiar People and Church of God, for their Tryal, and a Testimony to the Truth of that Religion, which God was now planting*

ing in the World :) *And if it first begin at us, (that is, at us Jews, who were the ancient People of God, and have now embraced and entertained the Revelation of the Gospel) what shall the end be of them, that obey not the Gospel of God?* (that is, how much more severely will God deal with the rest of the Jews who have crucified the Son of God, and still persist in their Infidelity and Disobedience to the Gospel?) *And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?* (that is, if good Men be saved with so much Difficulty, and *must through so many tribulations enter into the kingdom of God*, what will become of all Ungodly and Impenitent Sinners? Where shall they appear? How shall they be able to stand in the Judgment of the great Day?) From the Consideration of all which, the Apostle makes this Inference or Conclusion, in the last ver. of this Chapter, *Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their Souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.*



Thus you see the Connexion and Dependance of these words, upon the Apostle's foregoing Discourse. I shall explain the several Expressions in the Text, and then handle the main Points contained in them.

The Expressions to be explained are these: What is meant by *those that suffer according to the will of God?* what by *committing the keeping of our Souls to God, as unto a faithful Creator?* and what by *well-doing?*

1. What is meant by *suffering according to the will of God?* This may be understood of Suffering in a good Cause, such as God will approve: But this is not so probable; because this is mentioned afterwards, in the following Expressions of *committing the keeping of our Souls to God in well-doing*; that is, in suffering upon a good Account: And therefore the plain and genuine Sense of this Expression, seems to be this; that those who according to the good Pleasure of God's Will, and the wise dispensation of his Providence,

vidence are appointed to suffer for his Cause, should demean themselves so and so; *Let them that suffer according to the will of God*; that is, those whom God thinks fit to call to Suffering. And this agrees very well with the like Expression, Chap. 3. of this Epist. ver. 17. *for it is better, if the will of God be so, (that is, if God have so appointed it, and think it fit) that ye suffer for well-doing, than for evil-doing.*

Secondly, What is here meant by *committing the keeping of our Souls to God, as to a faithful Creator*? That is, to deposit our Lives, and all that belongs to us, in a word our selves, into the Hands and Custody of his Merciful Care and Providence who made us; and therefore we may be sure will faithfully keep what we commit to him: For as we are his Creatures, he is engaged to take care of us, and will not abandon the work of his own hands. Besides that, he hath Promised to be more especially concerned for good Men, to support them in their Sufferings for a good Cause, and to

Reward them for it; *and he is faithful that hath promised.*

And therefore there is great Reason and great Encouragement, in all our Sufferings for God's Cause and Truth, to commit our Souls to his Care and Custody: Our Souls, that is (as I said before) our Lives, and all that belongs to us; in a word, our selves: For so the word *Soul* is frequently used both in the Old and New Testament, *Psal. 7. 5. Let the Enemy persecute my Soul, and take it*; that is, my Life; for so it follows in the next words; *yea, let him tread down my Life upon the Earth.* And *Psal. 54. 3. Oppressors seek after my Soul.* And *Psal. 59. 3. they lie in wait for my Soul*; that is, my Life. And *Psal. 16. 10. Thou wilt not leave my Soul in Hell*; my Soul, that is, my self, thou wilt not suffer me to continue in the Grave, and under the power of Death, but wilt raise me up to Life again. And so likewise in the New Testament, *Mar. 8. 35. Whosoever will save his life, shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the Gospels, the same shall save it.* The same word which is here rendred  
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*Life*, in the very next Verse is rendered *Soul*; *For what shall it profit a Man, if he shall gain the whole World, and lose his own Soul?* that is, his *Life*. And so likewise *Joh. 12. 25.* *He that loveth his Life, shall lose it: And he that hateth his Life in this World, (in the Original the Word signifies Soul) He that hateth his Life in this World (that is, who neglecteth and exposeth his Life in this World, for the sake of Christ) shall keep it unto Life Eternal.* And *Luke 9. 25.* that which the other Evangelists render by the word *Soul*, or *Life*, he renders *himself*; *for what is a Man advantaged, if he gain the whole World, and lose himself?* And so here in the Text, *to commit the keeping of our Souls to God,* is to commit *our selves* to his Care and Providence.

*Thirdly*, What is here meant by *committing our selves to him in well-doing*? By *well-doing* is here meant, a fixt Purpose and Resolution of doing our Duty, notwithstanding all hazards and sufferings; which is call'd by *St. Paul, Rom. 2. 7. A patient conti-*

*nuance in well-doing.* It signifies sometimes acts of Goodness and Charity ; but in this Epistle it is taken in a larger sense, for Constancy and Resolution in the doing of our Duty ; as Chap. 2. 15. *for so is the will of God, that with well-doing* (that is by a Resolute Constancy in a good Course) *ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish Men.* And ver. 20. *But if when ye do well, and suffer for it* (that is, if when ye suffer for well-doing) *ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.* And Chap. 3. ver. 6. *As long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement ;* that is, are Resolute and Constant in doing your Duty, notwithstanding all Threatnings and Terrors. And ver. 17. *For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well-doing, than for evil-doing ;* that is, for your Religion and Constancy in so good a Cause, as Christians, and not as Criminals upon any other account.

So that the plain meaning of the words is, as if the Apostle had said, wherefore being forewarned of Suffering and Persecution for the Cause of Religion, the sum of my direction  
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and advice upon the whole matter is this ; that since it is the will of God that ye should suffer upon this account, commit your selves in the constant discharge of your Duty, and a good Conscience, to the particular Care and Providence of Almighty God, as the faithful Creatour.

And now I come to handle the particular Points contained in the words ; and they are these *Three*.

*First*, That when Men do suffer really and truly for the Cause of Religion, they may with confidence commit themselves (their Lives and all that is dear to them) to the particular and more especial Care of the Divine Providence.

*Secondly*, Always provided, that we do nothing contrary to our Duty, and a good Conscience ; for this the Apostle means, by *committing our selves to God, in well-doing*. If we step out of the way of our Duty, or do any thing contrary to it, God's Providence will  
not



not be concerned for us, to bear us out in such Sufferings.

*Thirdly*, I shall Consider what ground of Comfort and Encouragement the Consideration of God, as a *faithful Creator*, affords to us in all our Sufferings, for a good Cause, and a good Conscience.

*First*, When Men do suffer really and truly for the Cause of Religion, and God's Truth, they may with confidence and good assurance commit themselves, (their Lives and all that is dear to them) to the particular and more especial Care of his Providence. In the handling of this, I shall Consider these *three* things.

1. When Men may be said to Suffer really and truly for the Cause of Religion; and when not.

2. How far they may rely upon the Providence of God, to bear them out in these Sufferings.

3. What

3. What Ground and Reason there is to expect the more Particular and Especial Care of God's Providence, in case of such Sufferings.

1. When Men may be said to Suffer really and truly for the Cause of Religion, and God's Truth; and when not. In these Cases.

*First*, When Men Suffer for not renouncing the true Religion, and because they will not openly declare against it, and Apostatize from it. But it will be said, that in all these Cases the question is, what is the true Religion? To which I answer; That all Discourses of this Nature, about Suffering for Religion, do suppose the truth of some Religion or other. And among Christians, the truth of the Christian Religion is taken for granted, where ever we speak of Mens Suffering Persecution for it. And the plainest Case among Christians, is, when they are Persecuted, because they will not openly deny and renounce the Christian Religion. And this was generally

nerally the Case of the Primitive Christians; they were threatned with Tortures and Death, because they would not renounce Jesus Christ, and his Religion, and give demonstration thereof, by offering Sacrifices to the Heathen-gods.

*Secondly*, Men do truly suffer for the Cause of Religion, when they are Persecuted only for making an open Profession of the Christian Religion, by joyning in the Assemblies of Christians for the Worship of God; tho' they be not urged to deny and disclaim it, but only to conceal and dissemble the Profession of it, so as to forbear the maintenance and defence of it upon fitting Occasions, against the Objections of those who are Adversaries of it. For to conceal the Profession of it, and to decline the defence of it, when just occasion is offer'd, is *to be ashamed of it*; which our Saviour Interprets to be a kind of *denial* of it, and is opposed to *the confessing of him before Men*, Mat. 10. 32, 33. *Whosoever shall confess me before Men, him will I also confess before my Father which*

*is in Heaven: But whosoever shall deny me before Men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in Heaven. And this by St. Mark is express'd by being ashamed of Christ; that is, afraid and ashamed to make an open profession of him, and his Religion; Mark 8. 38. Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me, and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with the holy Angels.*

And this likewise was the Case of the Primitive Christians under the moderate Emperors, when the Persecution of them was not so hot, as to drive them to a denial of Christ; provided they would be contented to conceal and dissemble their Religion; in that case they did not hunt them out, nor Prosecute them to renounce their Religion, if they made no discovery of themselves. But yet they who suffered, because they would not conceal their Profession of Christianity, did truly suffer for the Cause of Religion.

*Thirdly,*

*Thirdly*, Men do likewise truly suffer for the Cause of Religion, when they suffer for not betraying it, by any indirect and unworthy means; such as among the Primitive Christians was the delivering up their Bibles to the Heathen, to be burnt and destroyed by them: For to give up that holy Book, which is the great Instrument of our Religion, is in Effect to give up Christianity it self, and to Consent to the utter extirpation of it.

And such likewise is the Case of those, who suffer in any kind for not contributing to break down the Fences of Religion in any Nation, where the Providence of God hath given it a Legal Establishment and Security; or, in a word, for refusing to countenance and further any Design, which visibly tends to the Ruine of Religion: For to destroy Religion, and to take away that which hinders the Destruction of it, are in Effect much the same thing.

*Fourthly*,

*Fourthly*, Men do truly suffer for the Cause of Religion, when they suffer for the Maintenance and Defence of any necessary and Fundamental Article of it, tho they be not required to renounce the whole Christian Religion: For what *St. Paul* says of the Article of *the Resurrection of the dead* is true of any other necessary Article of the Christian Religion, that the Denial of it, is a Subversion of the whole Christian Faith; because it tends directly to the overthrowing of Christianity, being a Wound given to it in a Vital and Essential Part. And this was the Case of those, who in any Age of Christianity have been persecuted by *Hereticks*, for the Defence of any Article of Christianity.

And I cannot but observe by the Way, that after the Heathen Persecutions were ceased, Persecution was first begun among Christians by *Hereticks*; and hath since been taken up, and carried much beyond that bad Pattern, by the Church of *Rome*; which, besides a standing *Inquisition* in all Countries,



tries, which are entirely of that Religion; (a Court, the like whereto, for the clancular and secret Manner of Proceeding, for the unjust and arbitrary Rules of it, for the barbarous Usage of Mens Persons, and the Cruelty of its Torments, to extort Confessions from them, the Sun never saw erected under any Government in the World, by Men of any Religion whatsoever.) I say, which, besides this Court, hath by frequent *Croisadoes* for the Extirpation of Hereticks, and by many Bloody *Massacres* in *France* and *Ireland*, and several other places, destroyed far greater numbers of Christians, than all the ten Heathen Persecutions; and hath of late revived, and to this very Day continues the same or greater Cruelties, and a fiercer Persecution of Protestants, if all the Circumstances of it be considered, than was ever yet practised upon them; and yet whilst this is doing almost before our eyes, in one of our next neighbour Nations, they have the Face to complain of the Cannibal Laws, and bloody Persecutions of the Church of *England*; and the Confidence to set up  
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for the great Patrons of Liberty of Conscience, and Enemies of all Compulsion and Force in Matters of Religion.

*Fifthly*, Men do truly suffer for the Cause of God and Religion, when they suffer for asserting and maintaining the Purity of the Christian Doctrine and Worship; and for opposing and not complying with those gross Errors and Corruptions, which Superstition and Ignorance had in a long Course of Time brought into the Christian Religion. Upon this Account many Good People suffer'd in many past Ages, for resisting the growing Errors and Corruptions of the Church of *Rome*, which at first crept in by Degrees, but at last broke in like a mighty Flood, which carryed down all before it, and threatned Ruin and Destruction to all that opposed them. Upon this Account also, infinite Numbers suffered among the *Waldenses* and *Albigenses*, in *Bohemia*, and in *England*; and in most other Countries in this *Western* Part of Christendom: And they who suffer'd upon this Account;

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suffer'd in a good Cause, and for the Testimony of the Truth.

*Sixthly*, and *Lastly*, Men do truly suffer for the cause of Religion, when they suffer for not disclaiming and renouncing any clear and undoubted Truth of God whatsoever ; yea though it be not a Fundamental Point and Article of Religion.

And this is the Case of those many Thousands, who, ever since the IV. Council of *Lateran*, which was in the Year 1215, (when *Transubstantiation* was first defin'd to be an Article of Faith, and necessary to Salvation to be believ'd) were persecuted with Fire and Sword, for not understanding those words of our Saviour, *this is my Body*, (which are so easily capable of a reasonable Sense) in the absurd and impossible Sense of *Transubstantiation*. And though this disowning of this Doctrin, be no expresse and direct Article of the Christian Religion ; yet it is a Fundamental Article of right Reason and common Sense : Because the admitting of *Transubstantiation*, does  
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undermine the Foundation of all Certainty whatsoever, and does more immediately shake the very Foundation of Christianity it self. Yea, tho' the Christian Religion were no ways concerned in this Doctrine, yet out of reverence to Reason and Truth, and a just animosity and indignation at confident nonsense, a Man of an honest and generous Mind would as soon be brought to Declare or Swear, that twice two do not make four, but five, as to profess his belief of *Transubstantiation*.

And tho' all Truths are not of equal Consequence and Concernment, yet all Truth is of God; and for that Reason, tho' we are not obliged to make an open profession of all Truths at all times, yet we are bound not to deny or renounce any Truth, nor to make profession of a known Falsehood or Error: For it is meerly because of the intrinsical Evil of the thing, that *it is impossible for God to lie*; and the Son of God thought it worth his coming into the World, and laying down his Life, *to bear witness to the Truth*. So  
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he himself tells us, *Joh. 18. 37. To this End was I born, and for this Cause came I into the World, that I should bear witness to the Truth.*

Thus I have shewn you in these plain Instances (to which most other Cases may be reduced) when Men may be said to suffer truly for the Cause of Religion, and Truth.

I shall mention two or three Cases wherein Men may seem to suffer for the Cause of Religion, but cannot truly be said to do so.

*First,* When Men rashly expose themselves to danger, and run upon sufferings for the sake of Religion. Thus several of the Primitive Christians voluntarily exposed themselves, when they were not called in question, and in the heat of their Affection and Zeal for God and Religion, offered themselves to Martyrdom, when none enquired after them. This, in the gracious interpretation of God, who knowing the sincerity of their Zeal, was pleased to overlook the indiscreet

discreet forwardness and rashness of it, might be accepted for a kind of *Martyrdom* : but cannot in Reason be justified, so as to be fit to be made a Pattern, and to be recommended to our imitation. For tho' God may be pleased to excuse the weakness of a well-meaning Zeal; yet he can approve nothing but what is Reasonable.

To suffer chearfully for the Cause of God and his Truth, when he calls us *to fight this good fight of faith*, and *to resist unto blood* ; and when we are reduced to that strait, that we must either die for God and his Truth, or deny them ; to suffer I say in this Case with Courage and Patience, is one of the Noblest of all the Christian Virtues. But to be perfect Volunteers, and to run our selves upon Sufferings, when we are not called to them, looks rather like *the Sacrifice of Fools* ; which tho' God may mercifully excuse, and pardon the Evil of the action, for the good Meaning of it ; yet he can never perfectly approve and accept of it. But I think there is little need now-



a-days to caution men against this rashness; it is well if they have the Grace and Resolution to Suffer when it is their Duty, and when they are called to it.

*Secondly*, Nor can Men be truly said to Suffer for the Cause of Religion, when they Suffer not for their Faith, but their Fancy, and for the wilful and affected Error of a mistaken Conscience. As when Men suffer for indifferent things, which in heat and passion they call *Superstition* and *Idolatry*; and for their own false Opinions in Religion, which they mistake for *Fundamental Articles* of the Christian Faith. In this Case, their mistake about these things will not change the Nature of them, nor turn their Sufferings into Martyrdom; and yet many Men have certainly Suffered for their own mistakes. For as Men may be so far deluded, as to *think they do God good service*, when *they kill his faithful Servants*; so likewise may they be so far deceived, as to Sacrifice their Lives, and all that is dear to them, to their own culpable Errors and Mistakes.

But

But this is Zeal without Knowledge, not *the Wisdom which descends from above*, but that which comes from beneath, and is like the fire of Hell, which is heat without light.

*Thirdly*, and *Lastly*; Nor can Men truly be said to Suffer for the Cause of God and Religion, when they Suffer for the open Profession and Defence of Truths not necessary. For tho' a Man be obliged to make an open Profession of all *Fundamental* and *Necessary Truths*; yet he is under no such Obligation to make Profession of Truths *not necessary* at all times; and unless he be called to deny them, he is not bound either to declare or defend them; he may hold his peace at other times, and be silent about them, especially when the open Profession of them will probably do no good to others, and will certainly do hurt to our selves, and the zealous endeavour to propagate such Truths will be to the greater prejudice of Charity, and the disturbance of the publick peace of the Church.

It was a good Saying of *Erasmus* (if we understand it, as I believe he meant it, of Truths not necessary) *adeo invisa sunt mihi discordia, ut veritas etiam contentiosa displiceat*: I am (says he) so perfect a hater of discord, that I am even displeased with truth, when it is the occasion of contention. As a Man is never to deny Truth, so neither is he obliged to make an open Profession of Truths not necessary, at all times; and if he Suffer upon that account, he cannot justify it to his own Prudence, nor have Comfort in such Sufferings; because he brings them needlessly upon himself; and no Man can have Comfort, but in Suffering for doing his Duty.

And thus I have done with the first thing I proposed to enquire into; namely, when Men may be truly said to Suffer for the Cause of Religion?

I proceed now to the

*Second Enquiry*; namely, how far Men may rely upon the Providence  
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of God, to bear them out in such Sufferings?

To which I Answer; That provided we do what becomes us, and is our Duty on our part, the Providence of God will not be wanting on his part, to bear us out in all our Sufferings for his Cause, one of these *three* ways.

*First*, To secure us from that violent degree of Temptation and Suffering, which would be too strong for Humane Strength and Patience; Or,

*Secondly*, In case of such extraordinary Temptation and Trial, to give us the extraordinary Supports and Comforts of his Holy Spirit; or else,

*Thirdly*, In case of a Temporary Fall and Miscarriage, to raise us up by Repentance, and a greater Resolution and Constancy under Sufferings. I shall speak severally to these.

I. Either

1. Either the Providence of God will not be wanting to secure us from that violent degree of Temptation and Suffering, which would be too strong for Humane Strength and Patience to bear. And this is a great security to good Men, against the fears of a final Miscarriage, after all their Labours, and Pains, and Sufferings in a Religious Course, by being over-born at last by the assault of a very violent and powerful Temptation. Not but that the best of Men ought always to have a prudent distrust of themselves, so as to keep them from security; according to the Apostle's Caution and Counsel; *be not high minded, but fear; and let him that stands, take heed lest he fall*; because, 'till we come to Heaven, we shall never be out of the danger and possibility of falling: But yet for all this, we may hope, by the sincerity and firmness of our Resolution, under the usual influences of God's Grace, to *acquit our selves like Men*, in ordinary Cases of Temptation and Suffering.

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And to this end, we should represent to our selves *those exceeding great and precious Promises*, which he hath made to Good Men, and his merciful Providence, which continually watcheth over them, and steers their course for them in this World, among those many Rocks which they are in Danger to split upon ; that he is able *to stablish us in the Truth*, and to keep us from falling, and *to present us faultless before the presence of his Glory with exceeding joy*, and *to preserve us to his heavenly Kingdom* ; and that if we do not forsake him, and forfeit his Care and Protection, he will *keep us by his mighty power through faith unto Salvation* ; either by his merciful Foresight and Prevention of those Temptations, which would probably be too hard for us ; or if he thinks fit they should befall us, by supporting us under them in an extraordinary Manner.

For I doubt not, but that the best Men do own their Security and Perseverance in Goodness, much more to the merciful Providence of God,  
pre-



preventing the Assaults of violent and dangerous Temptations, than to the Firmness and Constancy of their own resolutions. For there are very few Persons of so firm and resolute Virtue, but that one time or other, a Temptation might assault them upon such a Disadvantage, as would in all probability not only stagger them, but bear them down. Now herein the Providence of God towards good Men is very remarkable, in securing them from those Temptations, which are too strong for them to grapple withal; like a kind and tender Father, who, if he be satisfied of the dutiful Disposition of his Child towards him, will not try his Obedience to the utmost, nor permit too strong a Temptation to the contrary to come in his way. So the *Psalmist* represents God's tender Regard and Consideration of the Frailty and Infirmary of his Children, *Psal. 103. 13, 14. Like as a Father pitieth his Children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him: For he knoweth our frame, he remembreth that we are dust*; that is, he considereth us as men, and deals with us accordingly. Provided we be sincere, he

he will not suffer us to be set upon by Temptations that are too big for us. And therefore our blessed Saviour makes it one of the Petitions of that excellent Prayer, which he hath recommended to us; *Lead us not into Temptation*; that is, we should every day beg of God, that his Providence would keep us out of the Way of great and dangerous Temptations, as knowing that this will be a greater Security to us, than any strength and resolution of our own.

*Secondly,* Or in case of such violent and extraordinary Temptations, the Providence of God will not be wanting to give us the extraordinary Support and Comfort of his Holy Spirit, to bear us up under them. The Providence of God did take Care of Good Men in all Ages, and did afford Comfort to them, under great Tryals and Sufferings; but God never made so express and general a Promise of this, to all good Men, as he hath done by the Christian Religion. Never was so constant a Presence and Influence of the Divine Spirit vouchsafed and assured to  
Men

Men under any dispensation, as that of the Gospel; wherein the Spirit of God is promised to all that sincerely embrace the Christian Religion, to reside and dwell in them; not only to all the purposes of Sanctification and Holiness, but of Support and Comfort under the heaviest Pressures and Sufferings. For which Reason the Gospel is called *the Ministration of the Spirit*; and is upon this account said to be *more Glorious* than any other Revelation which God had ever made to Mankind.

We are naturally apt to be very much disheartned and cast down at the apprehension of great Sufferings, from the consideration of our own weakness and frailty; but the Spirit of Christ dwells in all true Christians, and the same Glorious Power, which raised up Jesus from the dead, works mightily in them that Believe. St. Paul useth very high Expressions about this Matter, *Eph. 1. 19. That ye may know* (saith he, speaking to all Christians) *what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according*  
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*to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand. So that every Christian is endowed with a kind of Omnipotence, being able (as St. Paul speaks of himself) to do and to endure all things, through Christ strengthening him. Of our selves we are very weak, and the Temptations and Terrors of the World are very powerful; but there is a Principle residing in every true Christian, that is able to bear us up against the World, and the power of all its Temptations. Whatsoever is born of God (saith St. John) overcometh the world; for greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world. The Holy Spirit of God, which dwells in all true Christians, is a more powerful Principle of Resolution, and Courage, and Patience, under the sharpest Trials and Sufferings, than that Evil Spirit which rules in the World is, to stir up and set on the Malice and Rage of the World against us. Ye are of God, little Children (he speaks this to the youngest and weakest Christians) Ye are of God, little Children, and have overcome;*

*overcome; because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.* The Malice and Power of the Devil is very great; but the Goodness and Power of God is greater. And therefore in case of extraordinary Temptation, good Men, by virtue of this Promise of God's Holy Spirit, may expect to be born up and comforted in a very extraordinary and supernatural manner, under the greatest Tribulations and Sufferings for righteousness sake.

And this was in a very signal and remarkable manner afforded to the Primitive Christians, under those Fierce and Cruel Persecutions to which they were exposed. And this may still be expected, in like Cases of extraordinary Sufferings for the Testimony of God's Truth. *If ye be reproached (saith St. Peter, in this 4th Chap. ver. 14.) for the Name of Christ, happy are ye; for the Spirit of Glory and of God resteth upon you.* The Spirit of God is here promised to strengthen and support all that Suffer for the Name of Christ, in a very conspicuous and glorious manner, according to that Prayer of St. Paul,

*Paul, Col. I. II.* That Christians might be strengthened with all might, according to God's Glorious Power, unto all Patience, and Long-suffering, with joyfulness. For when God is pleased to exercise good Men with Trials more than Humane, and such Sufferings as are beyond the common rate of Humane Strength and Patience to bear, he hath engaged himself to endue and assist them with more than Humane Courage, and Resolution. So *St. Paul* tells the *Corinthians*, who had not then felt the utmost rage of Persecution, *1 Cor. 10. 13.* *No Temptation or Trial hath yet befallen you, but what is common to Man*; that is, nothing but what is frequently incident to Humane Nature, and what by Humane strength, with an ordinary assistance of God's Grace, may be grappled withal. But, in case God shall call you to extraordinary Sufferings, he is faithful that hath promised, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it; that is, as he hath ordered and appointed so great a Temptation or Trial to befall you, so he will take care that it shall have a  
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happy issue, by enabling you to bear it, by affording you grace and strength equal to the violence and power of the Temptation. For, as *he* is said *to fall into temptation*, that is Conquered by it; so he is said *to get out of it*, or *escape it*, who is enabled to bear it, and, in so doing, gets the better of it. And for this we may rely upon the faithfulness of God, who hath Promised *that we shall not be tried above our strength*; either not above the strength which we have, or not above the strength which he will afford us in such a case.

And why then should we be daunted at the apprehension of any Suffering whatsoever, if we be secured that our Comfort shall be encreased in proportion to our Trouble, and our strength in proportion to the sharpness and weight of our Sufferings? Or else,

*Thirdly*, In case of Temporary falling, the Providence and Goodness of God will give them the Grace and Opportunity of recovering themselves from their fall by Repentance. For  
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the Providence of God may sometimes, for wise Ends and Reasons, see it fit to leave good Men to their own Frailty, and to faint and fall shamefully under Sufferings, so as to renounce and deny the Truth; sometimes to punish their vain Confidence in themselves; as in the case of *Peter*, who declared more Resolution, and bare it out with a greater Confidence, than any of the Disciples, when he said to our Saviour, *tho' all men forsake thee, yet will not I*; and yet after this he fell more shamefully than any of the rest, so as to deny his Master with horrid Oaths, and Imprecations, and *this*, tho' our Saviour had prayed particularly for him, *that his Faith might not fail*. From which Instance we may learn, that God doth not engage himself absolutely to secure Good Men from falling, in case of a great Temptation and Tryal; but if they be sincere, he will not permit them to fall finally, though he may suffer them to miscarry grievously for a time, to covince them of the Vanity of their Confidence in themselves and their own Strength.

Sometimes God may suffer Good Men to fall, in order to their more glorious Recovery, and the greater Demonstration and Triumph of their Faith and Constancy afterwards; which was the Case of that happy Instrument of our Reformation here in *England*, Arch-bishop *Cranmer*, who after he had been so great a Champion of the Reformation, was so overcome with Fear, upon the Apprehension of his approaching Sufferings, as to subscribe those Errors of the Church of *Rome*, which he had so stoutly opposed a great part of his Life: But he did not long continue in this State, but by the Grace of God, which had not forsaken him, was brought to Repentance; and when he came to suffer, gave such a Testimony of it, and of his Faith and Constancy, as was more glorious, and more to the Confirmation of the Faith of others, than a simple Martyrdom could have been, if he had not fallen; for when he was brought to the Stake, he put his right Hand (with which he had signed his Recantation) into the Fire, and with an undaunted Constancy

cy held it there, til it was quite burnt, for a Testimony of his true Repentance for that foul Miscarriage; and when he had done, gave the rest of his Body to be burnt, which he endured with great Courage and Cheerfulness to the last. So that he made all the amends possible for so great a Fault; and the Goodness of God, and the Power of his Grace was more glorified in his Repentance and Recovery, than if he had never fallen.

But what shall we say, when notwithstanding these Promises of extraordinary Comfort and Support, in case of extraordinary Sufferings, so great Numbers are seen to faint in the day of Trial, and to fall off from their Stedfastness? Of which there were many sad Instances, among the Primitive Christians, and have likewise been of late in our own Times, and in places nearer to us. This I confess is a very melancholy Consideration, but yet I think is capable of a sufficient Answer.

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And *first* of all, let this be establish'd for a firm and undoubted Principle, *that God is faithful to his Promise*; and therefore we ought much rather to suppose in all these Cases, that there is some Default on our part, than any Failure and Unfaithfulness on God's Part. Thus St. Paul, determines in a like Case, when the Promise of God seemed not to be made good to the Jews, he lays the Blame of it on their Unbelief, but acquits God of any Unfaithfulness in his Promise, Rom. 3. 3, 4. *For what if some did not believe, shall their unbelief make the Faith (or Fidelity) of God without effect? God forbid: Yea, let God be true, but every man a lyar.* This I confess does not answer the Difficulty; but yet it ought to incline and dispose us, to interpret what can fairly be offer'd for the Removal of it, with all the Favour that may be on God's side. I say then,

*Secondly*, That when good Men fall in Case of extraordinary Temptation, and recover again by Repentance, and give greater demonstration afterwards  
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of their Constancy and Resolution, in the Cause of God and his Truth, the Faithfulness of God in his Promises is sufficiently vindicated, as in the Cases I mentioned: Because the Promise of God is not absolute, that good Men shall be preserv'd from falling; but that *the Temptation shall have a happy issue*, and that they shall not *finally* miscarry. For Promises of this Nature are to be interpreted by us, and understood, as we do our Saviour's Prayer for *Peter* before his Fall, *that his faith should not fail finally*; but though he fell through too much Confidence in himself, he should, through the Grace of God assisting him, be enabled to recover by Repentance.

*Thirdly*, The Sincerity or Insincerity of Men in the Profession of the true Religion, is a thing which we cannot certainly know, because we do not see into Mens Hearts; but *he who knows the heart, and tries the Spirits of Men in a Ballance*, cannot be deceiv'd in this Matter; and where men are not sincere, the Promise of God is not concerned to hinder them from



discovering themselves ; and the Fall of such Persons, is no Reflection upon the Faithfulness of God. And it is reasonable enough to presume, that this may be the Case of not a few, and that (like *Simon Magus*) after they have made a very solemn Profession of Christianity, *their hearts may not be right in the sight of God.*

*Fourthly*, If we put the Case at the hardest, that some that were very sincere, after they have held out a great while, under the Extremity of Torments, have at last fainted under them, and yielded to the Malice and Cruelty of their Persecutors, and in this Amazement and Distraction have not long after expired, without any Testimony of their Repentance ; In this Case, both Reason and Charity ought to restrain us from passing any very positive and severe Sentence upon the State of such persons. For what do we know, but God whose Goodness will certainly make all the Allowance to Human Frailty that Reason can require ; (*For he knows whereof we are made ; and remembers that*

*that we are but dust*; he mercifully considers every Man's Case, and weighs all the Circumstances of it in an exact Ballance;) I say who can tell, but that in such a Case as I have mentioned, God may graciously be pleased to accept such a degree of constant Suffering of great Torments for so long a time, for a true *Martyrdom*, and not expect a more than Humane Patience and Resolution, where he is not pleased to afford more than Humane Strength and Support; and whether he may not look upon their failing and miscarriage at last, in the same rank with the indeliberate actions of Men in a Frenzy, and besides themselves?

And thus God may be said *with the temptation to make a way to escape, or, to give a happy issue to it*; since they were *enabled to bear it*, 'till being distracted by their Torments, their Understandings were thrown off the hinges, and incapable of exercising any deliberate acts of Reason. And without some such equitable consideration of the Case of such Persons, it will be very hard to reconcile some appearances

ances of things with the goodness of God, and the faithfulness of his Promise.

However, it will become us to abstain from all uncharitable and peremptory censure of the final Estate of such Persons, especially 'till we ourselves have given greater and better testimony of our Constancy; and in the mean time, to leave them to the Righteous and Merciful Sentence of *their* Master and *ours*, to whose Judgment we must all stand or fall.

I am sure it will very ill become those, who by the Providence of God have escaped those Sufferings, and are at present out of danger themselves, to sit in Judgment upon those who are left to endure this terrible Conflict, and have perhaps held out as long, or longer, than they themselves would have done in the like Circumstances. Let us rather earnestly beg of *the God of all grace and patience*, that he would endue us with a greater measure of Patience and Constancy, if he see fit to call us to the exercise of it; and (which we lawfully

lawfully may, after the Example of our Blessed Saviour) that *if it be his will, he would let this Cup pass from us*, and not try us with the like Sufferings, *lest we also be weary, and faint in our Minds.*  
I come now to the

*Third*, and last Enquiry which I proposed; what Ground and Reason there is, for good Men to expect the more Peculiar and Especial Care of God's Providence in case of such Sufferings?

The Providence of God extends to all his Creatures, according to that of the Psalmist, *the Lord is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his Works.* But he exerciseth a more particular Providence towards Mankind; and more peculiar yet towards those who study to please him, by obeying his Laws, and doing his Will. He that is assured of his own heart, that he loves God, and would do or suffer any thing for him, can have no cause to doubt but that God loves him, and is concerned for his Happiness. No Man was ever afraid of God, that was

was not conscious to himself that he had offended him, and by the wilful breach of his Laws had put himself out of the care of his Providence. But on the contrary, if our hearts give us this Testimony, that we have made it our sincere endeavour to please him, we are naturally apt to have good assurance and confidence of his favour and good-will towards us. This comfort the Mind of every good Man is apt to give him, from his own Reason, and the natural Notions which he hath of God.

But to free us from all doubt in this Matter, God himself hath told us so, and given us plentiful assurance of it in his word, *Psal. 11. 7. The Righteous Lord loveth Righteousness, his countenance doth behold the upright*; that is, he will be favourable unto them. *Psal. 33. 18. Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him; upon them that hope in his mercy. The eye of God, signifies his watchful Care and Providence over good Men.* So that besides the sure and well-grounded Reasonings, from the Essential Perfections of the  
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Divine Nature, the mercy and goodness of God ; *we have a more sure word of Promise*, in the exprefs declarations of God's Word, and more particularly in the case of great Temptations and Sufferings. For can we think, that the Scripture saith in vain, *Wait on the Lord, and be of good courage, and he shall strengthen thine heart ? Many are the afflictions of the Righteous, but the Lord delivereth him out of all ? The steps of a good Man are ordered by the Lord, and he delighteth in his ways ; tho' he fall, he shall not utterly be cast down, for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand ? The Salvation of the Righteous is of the Lord, he is their help in time of trouble.* The same Promises we find in the New Testament. *All things shall work together for good, to them that love God. God is faithful, who hath promised, that he will not suffer you to be tempted above what ye are able, but will with the temptation make a way to escape.* And to mention no more ; *Hold fast the Profession of your Faith without wavering, he is faithful that hath Promised ; viz. to support you under Sufferings, and to reward them.*

Thus



Thus much for the *first* Point, namely, that when Men do suffer truly for the Cause of Religion, they may with confidence commit themselves to the more Peculiar Care of the Divine Providence.

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The Second  
**S E R M O N**  
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1 PETER IV. 19.

*Wherefore, let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their Souls to him in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator.*

**F**ROM these words I proposed to Consider these *three* Points.

*First*, That when Men do Suffer really and truly for the Cause of Religion, they may with confidence commit themselves (their Lives, and all  
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that is dear to them) to the peculiar and more especial Care of the Divine Providence.

*Secondly*, This we may do always, provided that we be careful of our Duty, and do what is required on our Part; and that neither to avoid Sufferings, nor to rescue our selves out of them, we do any thing contrary to our Duty and a good Conscience; for this is the meaning of *committing our selves to God in well-doing*.

*Thirdly*, To shew what Ground of Comfort and Encouragement the Consideration of God, under the Notion of a *Faithful Creator*, does afford to us, under all our Sufferings for a good Cause and a good Conscience.

The *First* of these Points I have treated on at large in my former Discourse. I proceed now to the

*Second*, Namely, when in all our Sufferings for the Cause of Religion, we may with Confidence and good Assurance, commit our selves to the peculiar and more especial Care of  
God's

God's Providence? This is to be understood, always provided that we be careful of our Duty, and do what is required on our part; and that neither to avoid Sufferings, nor to rescue our selves out of them, we do any thing contrary to our Duty and a good Conscience. And this I told you was the meaning of *committing our selves to God in well-doing*; for if we either neglect our Duty, or step out of the Way of it, by doing things contrary to it, the Providence of God will not be concern'd to bear us out in such Sufferings. So that in our Sufferings for the Cause of God and Religion, *to commit our selves to him in well-doing*, may reasonably comprehend in it these following Particulars.

1. Provided always, that we neglect no lawful Means of our Preservation from Sufferings, or our Deliverance out of them: In this Case Men do not commit themselves to the Providence of God, but cast themselves out of his Care and Protection; they do not trust God, but tempt him, and do as it were try whether he will

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stand by us, when we desert our selves ; and bring us out of Trouble, when we would take no Care, would use no Endeavours to prevent it. If we will needlessly provoke Trouble, and run our selves upon sufferings; if we will neglect our selves, and the Lawful Means of our preservation; if we will give up, and part with those Securities of our Religion, which the Providence of God, and the Laws of our Country have given us; if we our selves will help to pull down the Fence which is about us; if we will disarm our selves, and by our own Act expose our selves naked and open to Danger and Sufferings; why should we think in this Case, that God will help us; when we would not help our selves, by those lawful Ways, which the Providence of God had put into our hands?

All Trust in God, and Dependance upon his Providence, does imply, that we joyn Prayer and Endeavour together; Faith in God, and a prudent and diligent use of Means: If we lazily trust the Providence of God, and so cast all our Care upon him, as to take none at all our selves, God will take  
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no Care of us. In vain do we rely upon the Wisdom, and Goodness, and Power of God ; in vain do we importune and tire Heaven with our Prayers, to help us against our Enemies and Persecutors, if we our selves will do nothing for our selves : In vain do we hope that God will maintain and defend our Religion, against all the secret Contrivances and open Assaults of our Enemies, if we, who are united in the Profession of the same Religion, and in all the Essentials of Faith and Worship, will for some small Differences in lesser Matters, which are of no moment, in Comparison of the things wherein we are agreed : I say, if for such slight matters, we will divide and fall out among our selves ; if when the Enemy is at the Gates, we will still pursue our Heats and Animosities, and will madly keep open those Breaches, which were foolishly made at first ; what can we expect, but that the common Enemy should take the Advantage, and enter in at them ; and whilst we are so unseasonably and senselessly contending with one another, that they should take the



Opportunity which we give them, to destroy us all.

2. Provided likewise, that we do not attempt our own Preservation or Deliverance from Suffering, by evil and unlawful Means: We must do nothing that is contrary to our Duty, and to a good Conscience; nor comply with any thing, or lend our helping Hand thereto, that apparently tends to the Ruin of our Religion, neither to divert and put off Sufferings for the present, nor to rescue our selves from under them; because we cannot with Confidence commit our selves to the Providence of God, but *in well-doing.*

This is an Eternal Rule, from whence we must in no Case depart, *That men must do nothing contrary to the Rules and Precepts of Religion, no not for the sake of Religion it self:* We must not break any Law of God, nor disobey the lawful Commands of lawful Authority, to free our selves from any Sufferings whatsoever; because the Goodness of no End can sanctifie Evil Means, and make them lawful: We must not *speake deceitfully for God,* nor  
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*lye, no not for the Truth ; nor kill men, though we could thereby do God and Religion the greatest Service. And tho' all the Casuists in the World should teach the contrary Doctrine, (as they generally do in the Church of Rome) yet I would not doubt to oppose to all those the single Authority of St. Paul, who expressly condemns this Principle, and brands it for a damnable Doctrine, that Evil may be done by us, that Good may come. Rom. 3. 8. And not as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say, let us do evil, that good may come, whose damnation is just. St. Paul it seems looked upon it as a most devilish Calumny, to insinuate that the Christian Religion gives the least Countenance to such damnable Doctrines and Doings as these ; and pronounceth their Damnation to be just, who either teach any such Principle as the Doctrine of Christianity, or practise according to it.*

Let those look to it, who teach,  
That a right Intention, and a good  
End, will render things, which are o-  
therwise evil and unlawful, not only

lawful to be done by us, but in many Cases meritorious; especially where the good of the Church, and the Extirpation of Heresie are more immediately concerned. Of this Nature are the Doctrines of Equivocation and Mental Reservation, and the Lawfulness of such Artificial ways of Lying, to avoid the Danger of the Law, when they are brought before Heretical Magistrates; and this is the common Doctrine of the most learned Casuists of all Orders in the Church of Rome; And such likewise are their Doctrines, of the Lawfulness of extirpating Hereticks, by the most barbarous and bloody Means, and of breaking Faith with them, tho' given by Emperours and Princes, in the most publick and solemn manner; both which are the avowed Doctrines of their General Councils, and have frequently been put in Practice, to the Destruction of many millions of Christians, better and more righteous than themselves. *But we have not so learned Christ, who have heard him, and been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus.* They who are rightly instructed

ed in the Christian Religion, are so far from thinking it lawful to do any thing that is evil, to bring others under suffering, that they do not allow it in any Case whatsoever, no not for the Cause of God and Religion, and to free themselves from the greatest Sufferings that can be inflicted upon them.

3. Provided also, that we do trust the Providence of God, and do indeed *commit our selves* to it; relying upon his Wisdom and Goodness, and entirely submitting and resigning up our selves to his Will and Disposal, both as to the Degree and the Duration of our Sufferings; believing that he will do that for us, which upon the whole matter, and in the final issue and result of things, will be best for us. That Blessing, wherewith *Moses* the Man of God blest the People of *Israel* before his Death, doth belong to good Men in all Ages: *He loveth his People,* and *all his Saints are in his hand:* Deut. 33. 3. Innumerable are the Promises in Scripture concerning the merciful Providence and Goodness of God, towards those *who trust in him, and hope*

*in his Mercy. Psal. 32. 10. Many sorrows shall be to the wicked: But he that trusteth in the Lord, mercy shall compass him about. Psal. 33. 18, 19, 20, 21, 22. Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him: Upon them that hope in his mercy: To deliver their soul from death, and to keep them alive in famine. Our soul waiteth for the Lord: he is our help and our shield. For our heart shall rejoyce in him: Because we have trusted in his holy name. Let thy mercy, O Lord, be upon us, according as we hope in thee. Psal. 34. 22. The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants: And none of them that trust in him shall be desolate. Psal. 37. 39, 40. But the salvation of the Righteous is of the Lord, he is their strength in the time of trouble. And the Lord shall help them and deliver them: He shall deliver them from the wicked, and save them because they trust in him. Psal. 31. 19. O how great is thy goodness, which thou hast laid up for them that fear thee; which thou hast wrought for them that trust in thee before the Sons of men! Psal. 55. 22. Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee: He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved. Psal. 125. 1.*

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*They that trust in the Lord shall be as mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth for ever. Esa 26. 3, 4. Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the Lord for ever: For in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength.*

4. Provided yet further, that we pray earnestly to God for his Gracious Help and Assistance, for his merciful Comfort and Support under Sufferings; that he would be pleased to strengthen our Faith, and to encrease and lengthen out our Patience, in proportion to the Degree and Duration of our Sufferings.

All the Promises which God hath made to us, are upon this Condition, that we earnestly seek and sue to him for the Benefit and Blessing of them. *Psal. 50. 15. Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorifie me. Ezek. 36. 37.* After a great Deliverance, and many Blessings promised to them, this Condition is at last added, *Thus saith the Lord*



Lord God, I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them. And this likewise is the tenor of the Promises of the New Testament, *Mat. 7. 7. Ask, and it shall be given you: seek, and ye shall find: knock, and it shall be opened unto you.* And in this very Case that I am speaking of, God expects that we should apply our selves to him, for Spiritual Wisdom and Grace, to behave our selves under Sufferings as we ought: *Jam. 1. 2,3,4.* Where speaking of the manifold Temptations that Christians would be exercised withal; he directs them to pray to God for Wisdom to demean themselves under Persecutions, with Patience, and Constancy, and Cheerfulness, *My Brethren account it all joy, when ye fall into divers Temptations;* (meaning the Temptations and Tryals of Suffering in several kinds) *Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have its perfect work.* And because this is a very difficult Duty, and requires a great deal of Spiritual Skill, to demean our selves under Sufferings as we ought, therefore he adds in  
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the next words: *If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.*

And this earnest application we are to make to God, for *his grace and seasonable help in time of need*; not to put him in mind of his Promise, but to testifie our dependance upon him, and expectation of all good from him. And we must likewise use great importunity in our Prayers to God, to assist us and stand by us in the day of Trial, and the hour of Temptation. And therefore our Saviour heaps up several words, to denote the great earnestness and importunity which we ought to use in Prayer, bidding us *to ask, and seek, and knock*. And to shew that he lays more than ordinary weight upon this Matter, and to encourage our importunity, he spake two several Parables to this purpose; the first, *Luke 11. 5.* of the Man who by *meer importunity* prevailed with his Friend to rise at midnight to do him a kindness, which our Saviour applies to encourage our importunity in Prayer,

*ver. 9.*

ver. 9. *And I say unto you, ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.* The other is the Parable of the importunate Widow, and unjust Judge, related by the same Evangelist, *Luke 18. 1.* with this Preface to it; *and he spake a Parable unto them to this end, that Men ought always to pray, and not to faint.* And to speak the truth, they seem at first sight two of the oddest of all our Saviour's Parables, if the design of them were to insinuate to us that God is to be prevailed upon, by the *meer importunity* of our Prayers, to grant our Requests: but our Blessed Saviour, who best knew his own meaning, tells us, that all he design'd by it, was only to signifie, *that we ought always to pray, and not to faint; that is, to continue instant in Prayer, and not to give over after once asking, as if we despaired of prevailing.* Not that *meer importunity* prevails with God to give us those things which he is otherwise unwilling to grant; but because it becomes us to be fervent, and earnest, to testifie our Faith and Confidence in the goodness of God, and the deep sense we have of  
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our own weakness, and wants, and unworthiness; and likewise that we set a true value upon the Blessings and Favours of God, as worth all the earnestness and importunity we can use: And in this decent and sober sense, the success of our Prayers may truly be said to depend upon our *importunity*; not that it is necessary to move God to grant our Requests, but that it becomes us to be thus affected, that we may be the more fitly qualified for the Grace and Mercy which God is willing to confer upon us.

I have been the longer upon this, to give us a right notion of this matter, and that we may the more distinctly understand the true Reason why our Saviour does require so much earnestness and importunity of Prayer on our part; not at all to work upon God, and to dispose him to shew mercy to us (for that he is always inclinable to, when ever we are fit for it) but only to dispose and qualify us to receive the grace and mercy of God, with greater advantage to our selves.

*Fifthly,*

*Fifthly*, Provided moreover, that we be not confident of our selves, and of the force and strength of our own Resolution. We know not our selves, nor the frailty and weakness of our own Resolution, 'till we are tried. 'Tis wise Advice which Solomon gives us, and never more seasonable than in the day of trial, *Prov. 3. 5, 6, 7. Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not to thine own understanding; in all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths; be not wise in thine own eyes; that is, be not conceited and confident of thine own wisdom and strength, or ability in any kind; there is a secret Providence of God, which mingles it self with the actions and spirits of Men, and disposeth of us unknown to our selves; and what we think to be the effect of our own strength and resolution, of our own wisdom and contrivance, proceeds from an higher Cause, which unseen to us, does steer and govern us. So the Wise Man observes, Prov. 20. 24. Man's goings are of the Lord, how can a Man then understand his own ways? And therefore we have reason every one to say with the Prophet,*  
*Jer.*

*Jer. 10. 23. O Lord, I know that the way of Man is not in himself, it is not in Man that walketh to direct his steps. Our feet will soon slip, if God do not uphold us by his hand. Remember how shamefully the chief of our Lord's Disciples miscarried, by too much confidence in himself, I mean St. Peter; in whose fall we may all see our own frailty; if God do but permit the Devil to have the winnowing of us, there will be a great deal of chaff found in the best of us. What St. Paul said of himself, 2 Cor. 12. 10. When I am weak, then am I strong, we shall all find true, when it comes to the trial; we are then strongest, when, in a just sense of our own weakness, we rely most upon the strength and power of God.*

*Sixthly, Provided furthermore, that according to our ability we have been much in the exercise of Alms and Charity. For well-doing, or doing good, is sometimes taken in a narrower sense, not improper here to be mentioned, tho' perhaps not so particularly intended here in the Text, for works of Charity and Alms. As Heb. 13. 16. But to do*



do good, and to communicate (that is, to the necessities of the Poor) forget not, for with such Sacrifices God is well pleased. This kind of well-doing is a special Preservative in times of Evil; there is no kind of Grace or Virtue to which there are in Scripture more special Promises made, of our Protection and Preservation from Evil and Suffering, of Support and Comfort under them, and Deliverance out of them, than to this of a Charitable and Compassionate Consideration of those who labour under want or Suffering. *Psal. 37. 3. Trust in the Lord, and do good, so shalt thou dwell in the Land, and verily thou shalt be fed: And ver. 19. speaking of Righteous or Merciful Men, They shall not be ashamed in the evil time, and in the days of Famine they shall be satisfied. Psal. 41. 1, 2. Blessed is he that considereth the Poor, the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble; the Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive, and he shall be blessed upon the Earth; and thou wilt not deliver him unto the will of his Enemies.*

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There are likewise in the Apocryphal Books Excellent Sayings for the encouragement of Charity, as that which will be particularly considered and rewarded to us in the times of Danger and Distress, in the days of Affliction and Suffering, Tob. 4. 7, 8, 9, 10. Give Alms of thy substance, and turn not thy face from any Poor Man, and the face of God shall not be turned away from thee; if thou hast abundance, give Alms accordingly, if thou hast but a little, be not afraid to give according to that little, for thou layest up for thy self a good treasure against the day of necessity, because that Alms do deliver from death, and suffereth not to come into darkness. Eccius. 3. 31. Speaking of him that gives Alms, and is ready to do Kindness to others, He is mindful of that which may come hereafter; and when he falleth he shall find a stay. And, Chap. 29. 11, 12, 13. Lay up thy treasure according to the Commandment of the most High, and it shall bring thee more profit than Gold, shut up alms in thy store-houses, and it shall deliver thee from all affliction, it shall fight for thee

*thee against thine Enemies, better than a mighty shield, and strong spear.*

I have often said it, and am verily perswaded of it, that one of the best signs of Gods Mercy and Favour to this poor Nation, is, that God hath been pleased of late years to stir up so general a disposition in Men to works of Alms and Charity, and thereby to revive the Primitive Spirit of Christianity, which so eminently *abounded in this Grace*, and taught *those who believed in God, to be careful to maintain and practise good works.* And nothing gives me greater hopes that God hath Mercy still in store for us, than that Men are so ready to shew Mercy; there are great Objects to exercise our Charity upon in this time of the general suspension of Trade and Business, from an apprehension of approaching troubles; by reason whereof, both the numbers and the necessities of the Poor are greatly and daily increased among us; and besides the Poor of our own Nation, God hath sent us great numbers from abroad; I mean those who are fled hither for shelter, from  
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that violent storm of Persecution which hath lately fallen upon them for the Cause of our common Religion. According to the compassion we shew to them, we may expect that God will either preserve us from the like Sufferings, or graciously support us under them. What do we know, but that God is now trying us, and hath purposely put this opportunity into our hands, of preventing, or mitigating, or shortning our own Sufferings, according as we extend our Charity and Pity to those who have suffered so deeply for the Cause of God, and his truth.

*Seventhly*, Provided in the last place, and above all, that we be sincere in our Religion, and endeavour to be universally good, and *holy in all manner of Conversation, and to abound in all the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, to the praise and glory of God.* This is the largest sense of *well-doing*, and the most necessary of all the rest, to prepare us for Sufferings, and to give us Courage and Constancy under them; and likewise to engage the Providence of God to a tender care

of us, and Concernment for us, if he shall see it fit to bring us into a State of Suffering.

But if we live in open Contempt and Violation of God's Laws, if we make no Conscience of our Ways and Actions, we cannot possibly have any well grounded Trust and Confidence in God, for *he hates all the workers of iniquity, and his Providence sets it self against them for evil.* Bad Men draw many Mischiefs and Inconveniencies upon themselves, as the Natural Consequence of their Actions; but besides this, the Vengeance of God haunts and pursues Evil-doers, and his just Providence many times involves them in many Difficulties and Dangers, besides and beyond the Natural Course of things: *Upon the wicked (says David) he will rain snares:* So that as ever we expect the comfortable Effects of the Divine Care and Providence, we must live in a dutiful Obedience to God's Holy Will and Laws.

Bad Men may make a Profession of the true Religion, and may in some sort

fort believe it, tho' they do not live according to it; and yet perhaps for all this, out of meer Generosity and Obstinacy of Mind, they cannot bear to be threatned and terrified out of the Profession of the Truth; and will endure a great deal of Trouble and Inconvenience, before they will renounce it; knowing themselves to be so far in the Right, that they stand for the Truth, and hoping perhaps thereby to make some amends for their bad Practice. But when all is done, nothing gives a Man true Courage and Resolution, like the Testimony of our own Hearts, concerning our own Sincerity, and the Conscience of well-doing. And on the contrary, he that hath not the Resolution and Patience to mortifie his Lusts, and to restrain his Appetites, and to subdue his irregular Passions, for the sake of God and Religion, will not easily bring himself to submit to great Sufferings upon that Account. There is considerable Difficulty in the Practice of Religion, and the resolute Course of a Holy Life; but surely it is much easier *to live* as Religion



requires we should do, than *to lay down our Lives* for it; and (as I have told you upon another Occasion) he that cannot prevail with himself *to live like a Saint*, will much more hardly be perswaded *to die a Martyr*. I proceed to the

*Third Point*, namely, what ground of Comfort and Encouragement the Consideration of God under the Notion of *a faithful Creator*, does afford to us under all our Sufferings for a good Conscience and a good Cause. *Let them that suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their Souls to him, in well-doing, as unto a faithful Creator*. And in this I shall be very brief.

And this is a firm ground of Comfort and Encouragement to us, under all our Sufferings for God, to consider him as the Author of our Beings, or as it is exprest in the Text, *as a faithful Creator*; one that is not fickle and inconstant in his Affection and Kindness to his Creatures; but is true to his own Design, and will not abandon and forsake

take the Work of his own Hands : So great a Benefit as that of our Beings, freely conferr'd upon us, is but an earnest of God's further Kindness to us, and Future care of us ; if by our ill Carriage towards him, we do not render our selves unworthy and incapable of it : That we are God's Creatures, is a Demonstration that he hath Kindness for us ; if he had not, he would never have made us ; as it is excellently said in the Wisdom of Solomon, Cap. 11. 23. 24. *Thou hast mercy upon all, for thou lovest all the things that are, and abhorrest nothing which thou hast made : For never wouldst thou have made any thing, if thou hadst hated it. And ver. 26. Thou sparest all, for they are thine, O Lord, thou lover of Souls.*

To whom then may we with so much Confidence commit our selves, as to him who freely gave us our Being? From whom may we expect so tender a Regard and Consideration, of our Case, and all the Circumstances of it ; as from this great Founder and Benefactor? For *he that made us knows our Frame, and whereof we are*  
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*made;*

*made, and how much we are able to bear; he considers our Strength, or rather our Weakness, and what Courage and Resolution he hath endued us withal, and what Comfort and Support we stand in need of in the day of Tribulation. And as they who make Armour, are wont to try that which they think to be good and well temper'd, with a stronger Charge, not to break and hurt it, but to prove and praise it. So God exerciseth those whom he hath fitted and tempered for it, with manyfold Temptations, that the tryal of their faith, as St. Peter expresseth it, 1 Pet. 1. 7. being much more precious than of gold tried in the Fire, may be found unto praise, and honour, and glory, at the appearing of Jesus Christ.*

So that this Consideration that we are God's Creatures, does (as I may say) oblige him in Faithfulness to his own Act, and in Consequence of his bringing us into Being at first, to be concern'd for us afterwards, so as never to abandon us, nor quite to take away his loving-kindness and Mercy from us; till we are good for  
nothing,

nothing, and do in a manner cease to be what he made us, that is *Reasonable Creatures*. A Person or People must have proceeded to the utmost degree of degeneracy, when God will consider them no longer as his Creatures, nor shew any Pity or Favour to them; things must be come to extremity, when God deals thus with us, as he threatened the People of *Israel*, *Isa. 27. 11. When the boughs are withered, they shall be broken off, and set on fire: for it is a People of no understanding: therefore he that made them, will not have mercy on them, and he that formed them, will shew them no favour.*

And now I have done with the *three* Points which I proposed to handle from this Text, and the Discourse which I have made upon them, does all along apply it self, by directing us how we ought to commit our selves to the Providence of God, in all Cases of Danger and Suffering, especially for the Cause of God and his Truth, *viz.* in the faithful discharge of our Duty and a good Conscience, and by a firm  
Trust

Trust and Confidence in the Wisdom and Goodness of the Divine Providence, not doubting but that *he who made us, and knows our frame,* will have a tender Care of us, and *not suffer us to be tempted above what we are able.*

And as to our present Danger, and that Terrible Storm which threatens us, let us pray to God, if it be his will, to divert it; but if otherwise he hath determined, to fit and prepare us for it. And let us be fervent and earnest in our Prayers to him; not that he is moved by our importunity, but that we may thereby be qualified and made fit to receive the Mercy which we beg of him.

And let us take this Occasion to do that which we should have done without it, *to break off our Sins by Repentance, and to turn every one of us from the evil of our ways;* that hereby we may render God propitious to us, and put our selves under the more immediate Care and Protection of his Providence; that we may prevent his Judgments, and turn away his wrath and displeasure

displeasure from us, as he did once from a great and sinful City and People, upon their sincere Humiliation and Repentance, *Jonah 3. 10.* where it is said of the People of *Niniveh*, *That God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way, and God repented of the evil that he had said that he would do unto them, and he did it not.* Above all, let us be sincere in the profession of our Religion, and conscientious in the Practice of it; nothing will bear us up under great Trials and Sufferings, like the testimony of a good Conscience, void of offence towards God and Men.

I will conclude this whole Discourse with those Apostolical Blessings and Prayers, *Colos. 1. 10, 11.* *That ye may walk worthy of the Lord, unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, strengthened with all might, according to his glorious Power, unto all patience, and long-suffering, with joyfulness.* And *2 Thes. 2. 16, 17.* *Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God even our Father, who hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting Consolation*  
and



*and good hope through Grace, comfort  
your hearts, and stablish you in every  
good word, and work. To him be Glory  
and Dominion, for Ever, and Ever,  
Amen.*

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JOHN IX. 4.

*I must work the works of him that  
sent me, while it is day: The  
night cometh when no man can  
work.*

**T**Hese words our Blessed Saviour  
spake of himself, whilst he  
was upon Earth; in which he  
tells us, that he was sent by God into  
the World, and had a certain Work  
and Employment appointed him during  
his Abode in it. A great Work indeed!  
to instruct, and reform, and save Man-  
kind.

kind. A Work of great Labour, and Pains, and Patience, not to be done in a short time; and yet the time for doing it was not long after he came into the World: It was a good while before he began it, and after he began it, the time of Working was not long, before the Night came and put an End to it: *I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: The night cometh when no man can work.*

But this which our Saviour here speaks of himself, and which properly belongs to him, and no other; may yet be accommodated to every Man, with some Allowance for the Difference and Disproportion. For tho' every Man be not sent by God into the World, after so peculiar a manner, and upon so particular and vast a Design: Yet upon a general Account, every Man is sent by God into this World, and hath a Work given him to do in it, which he is concern'd vigorously to mind and to prosecute with all his Might. And tho' every Man be not sent to save the whole World, as the Son of God was, yet every Man is sent by God  
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into the World, *to work out his own Salvation*, and to take Care of *that* in the first Place, and then to promote the Salvation of others, as much as in him lies. So that every one of us may, in a very good Sense, accommodate these Words of our Saviour to himself: *I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: The night cometh when no man can work.*

I shall therefore at this time take the Liberty to handle these words according to this moral Accommodation of them, and apply what our Saviour here says of himself to every Man that cometh into the World: And this I shall do, by shewing these *three* things.

*First*, That every Man hath a Work assigned him to do in this World, by him that sent him into it; and may in some Sense say, as our Blessed Saviour did of himself, *I must work the works of him that sent me.*

*Secondly*, That there is a certain and limited

limited time for every Man to do this Work in. *While it is day.*

*Thirdly,* That after this Season is expired, there will be no further Opportunity of working. *The Night cometh when no man can work.*

*First,* Every Man hath a Work assigned him to do in this World, by him that sent him into it; and may in some sense say, as our Blessed Saviour did of himself; *I must work the works of him that sent me.* God who made man a reasonable Creature, and hath endowed him with Faculties, whereby he is capable of knowing and serving him; hath appointed him a Work and Service suitable to these Faculties: And having infused an immortal Soul into this Earthy Body, hath certainly designed him for a State beyond this Life, in which he shall be for ever happy or miserable, according as he useth and demeanes himself in this World.

So that the Work which every one of us hath to do in this World, is to  
prepare

prepare, and fit our selves for that Eternal Duration which remains for us after Death: For the Life which we live now in this World, is a time of Exercise, a short state of Probation and Tryal, in order to a durable and endless state, in which we shall be immutably fixt in another World. This World, into which we are now sent for a little while, is as it were God's School, in which immortal Spirits, clothed with Flesh, are trained and bred up for Eternity; and therefore the best, the only sure way to be happy for ever, is, so to improve the short and uncertain time of this Life, that we may approve our selves to God in this World, and enjoy him in the next; or (as St. Paul expresseth it) *that having our fruit unto Holiness, our end may be everlasting Life.*

And this Work consists in these three things.

*First*, In the Care of our own Salvation.

*Secondly*, In doing what we can, to promote the Salvation of others.

*Thirdly*, And in order to both these, in the careful Improvement and good Husbandry of our time.



*First*, In the Care of our own Salvation. And this consists in *two* things.

1. In the Worship of Almighty God.

2. In the careful and conscientious Practice and Obedience of his Holy Laws.

1. The Care of our own Salvation consists in the pious and devout Worship of Almighty God ; that we honour him, and pay him that Homage and Respect, which is due from Creatures to him that made them, and is the great Sovereign, and Judge of the World ; that we have an inward Reverence and Esteem of him , and that we express this by all solemn external acknowledgments of him ; as by praying to him for the supply of our Wants ; by praising him for all the Blessings and Benefits which we have received at his Hands ; and that we set apart constant and solemn times for the Performance of these Duties ; and that when we are employed in them, we be serious, and hearty, and attentive to what we are about, and perform every part of Divine Worship with those Circumstances of Reverence and Respect, which may testify our awful Sense of the

the Divine Majesty, and our inward and profound Veneration of him, with whom we have to do. And this is that which is directly and properly *Religion*.

2. This Care of our own Salvation, does consist likewise in the conscientious and constant Obedience and Practice of all God's Holy Laws, in the Conformity of our Lives and Actions to the Laws which he hath given us, whether they be natural or written upon our Hearts, or made known to us by the Revelation of his Word; that we govern our Passions by Reason, and moderate our selves in the use of sensual Delights, so as not to transgress the Rules of Temperance and Chastity; that we demean our selves towards others, and converse with them with Justice and Fidelity, with Kindness and Charity.

These are the Sum of the Divine Laws, and the Heads of our Duty towards our selves and others; all which are more powerfully enforced upon us, by the Revelation of the Gospel, and the plain Promises and Threatnings of it; the Faith of Christ being the most firm and effectual Principle both of Pi-

ety towards God, and of Universal Obedience to all his particular Commands.

And this is the great work which God hath sent us to do in the World; so the Wise Man sums up our Duty, *Eccl. 12. 13. Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.* The Fear and Reverence of the Divine Majesty, is the great Foundation and Principle of Religion, but Obedience to God's Laws is the Life and Practice of it. God does not expect that we should spend the greatest part of our time, in the immediate Acts of Religion, and in the solemn Duties of his Worship and Service, but only that we should allot a fitting Proportion of our time to these, according to the Circumstances of our Condition in this World, and the Example of Holy and Good Men that are in the like Circumstances with our selves: For such is the Goodness of God, that he does not only allow us to provide for the Necessities and Conveniencies of this Life, but hath made it our Duty so to do. It is one of the Precepts of the Gospel, which the Apostle chargeth the Bishops and Teachers of the Gospel to inculcate  
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frequently upon Christians, *that they which have believed in God, should be careful to maintain good works*; that is, to employ themselves in the works of an honest Calling *for necessary uses*; that is, for the support of their Families, and the relief of those who are in want and necessity. And the Apostle lays great weight and stress upon this, as a very great Duty, *Tit. 3. 8. This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God, might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto Men*; that is, of general benefit and advantage to Mankind.

So that no Man's Calling is a hindrance to Religion, but a part of it; and by performing the Duties of Piety in their proper Seasons, and spending the rest of our time in any honest and useful Employment, we may make our whole Life a perpetual serving of God; we may *glorifie God in our eating and drinking*, and in all other lawful and useful actions of Life; in serving the Occasions and Necessities of Life, with Sobriety and Temperance, and in managing our Worldly Commerce

merce with Justice and Integrity, we may serve God, and perform considerable Duties of Religion.

So that provided we do nothing that is sinful, and manage the Actions and Concernments of this Life, with a due regard and subserviency to the great interests of Eternity, we may do the work of God all the while we are providing for our selves, and employed in the works of an honest Calling: For God, who hath designed this Life in order to the other, considers the necessities of our present state, and allows us to make provision for it.

There are some Persons indeed, whose Birth and Condition sets them above the common Employments of Life, and the Works of an ordinary Calling: But these also have a work given them to do; for God hath sent no Man into the World to no purpose, and only to take his pastime therein; *neque enim ita generati sumus à natura, ut ad ludum & jocum facti esse videamur; sed ad severitatem potius, & quadam studia graviora atque majora;* for we are not (says Tully de Off. Lib. 1.) so framed by Nature, as if we were made for sport and jest; but for more serious Employ-

*Employments, and for greater and weightier business*; and those who are tied to no particular Calling, may allow so much larger portions of their time to Religion, and the Service of God; and God likewise expects from them, that they should be useful to Mankind in some higher and nobler way, according to the publickness of their station, and influence. Such Persons may be serviceable to their Country, and the Affairs of Government, and in the care of publick Justice, and may employ their time in preparing and rendering themselves more fit for this Service. They may find a great deal of work to do in the good government of their Families, and in the prudent care and management of their Estates, and in reconciling differences among their Neighbours, and in considering the necessities of the Poor, and providing for their supply.

So that besides the proper work of Religion, and the more immediate Service of God, every Man in the World, how exempt soever his Condition be from the common care and drudgery of Humane Life, may find work enough wherein he may usefully employ all his



time, and provide for his own, and for the common benefit of Mankind: And God expects it as a Duty from such, that every Man should employ himself in some work or other, suitable to the station in which God hath placed him in this World.

*Secondly*, The work which God hath given us to do in the World, consists in doing what we can to further and promote the Salvation of others: This chiefly lies upon *us*, who are *the Ministers of God*, and *to whom the word of Reconciliation is committed*. We are more especially Commissioned and Appointed for this work, and are *Ambassadors for Christ*, to beseech Men in his stead to be reconciled to God. We are sent by God in a more peculiar manner, and appointed for this very work, to watch for Mens Souls, and to be the Instruments and Means of their Eternal Happiness. And therefore we who are sent by God in a more peculiar manner, and have this work assigned to us to do in the World, ought to be very vigorous and industrious in it. And this, whether we consider the Nature of our Employment, or the Glorious Reward of it.

*First,*

*First*, If we consider the Nature of our Employment, both in respect of the Honour and the Happiness of it; 'tis the most Honourable work that Mortal Man can be employed in; 'tis the same in kind, and in the main end and design of it with that of the Blessed Angels, for we also are *Ministring Spirits, sent forth by God to Minister, for the good of those who shall be heirs of Salvation.* We are the *Messengers and Ambassadors of God to Men*, sent to treat with them about the terms of their Peace and Reconciliation with God, to offer Salvation to them, and to direct them to the best ways and means of procuring it. Nay, we have the Honour to be employed in the very same work that the Son of God was, when he was upon Earth, *to seek and to save them that are lost; and to call Sinners to Repentance; and to carry on that work, whereof he himself laid the Foundation when he was in the World.* And what greater Honour can be put upon the Sons of Men, than to help forward that glorious Design and Undertaking of the Son of God, for the Salvation of Mankind.

And

And 'tis an Employment no less Happy than Honourable; 'tis not to drudge about the mean and low Concernments of this Life, a perpetual toil and care about *what we shall eat and drink, and wherewithal we shall be cloathed*, which is the business of a Worldly Employment; but it is a direct and immediate *seeking of the Kingdom of God, and his Righteousness*, and a continual endeavour to promote these. It does not consist in the labour of our Body, and in Bodily toil; but in the delightful exercise of our Minds, about the best and noblest Objects, God, and Heaven, and Eternity; in an earnest and faithful endeavour by all wise ways and means to gain Souls to God, and *to turn Sinners from the error of their ways*, and to prevent their Eternal Ruine and Destruction; and next to the procuring of our own Happiness, to be instrumental to the Happiness of others, which is certainly the most pleasant and noble work that we can possibly be employed in; especially if we consider, that by the very nature of our Employment, we do at the same time, and by the very same means, carry on both these designs, of  
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the Salvation of our selves, and others. So St. *Paul* tells *Timothy*, when he exhorts him upon this very Consideration, *to give himself wholly to this Blessed Work* ; because, says he, *in doing this, thou shalt both save thy self, and them that hear thee*, 1 Tim. 4. 16.

And when two of the greatest and best designs in the World, our own Happiness, and the Salvation of others, do so happily meet in one, and are jointly carried on by the same labour ; this ought to be a great spur and incitement to us, to be vigorous and unwearied, and *abundant in the work of the Lord* ; and a mighty encouragement to us *to preach the word, to be instant in season, and out of season, and to be Examples to others, in Word, in Conversation, in Charity, in Spirit, in Faith, in Purity* ; as St. *Paul* chargeth *Timothy* in the most solemn and awful manner, *before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing, and his Kingdom*, 1 Tim. 4. 12. and 2 Tim. 4. 1. And then,

*Secondly*, If we consider the glorious Reward of this work. If we be Faithful and Industrious in it, it will advance

vance us to a higher degree of Glory and Happiness in the other World: *They that be wise* (says the Prophet, Dan. 12. 3.) *shall shine as the brightness of the Firmament, and they that turn many to righteousness, as the Stars for ever and ever.* They that are industrious in this work, as they are *worthy of double honour* in this World, so they shall shine with a double glory and lustre in the other.

But tho' this work of promoting the Salvation of others, be chiefly incumbent upon those whose Office it is to attend upon this very thing; yet we are all of us concerned in it, according to the advantages and opportunities we have for it. Every Man is concerned to help forward the Salvation of his Brother, and not to let him perish, if he can help it; and it is in every Man's power to contribute something to this Blessed Work of saving others, by seasonable Counsel and Advice, by kind and gentle reproof, but especially by a Holy and Exemplary Conversation, by a shining Virtue, which hath a silent power of persuasion, and I know not what secret charm

charm and attraction to draw and allure others to the imitation of it.

*Thirdly,* And in order to both these, the saving of our selves, and others, this work which God hath given us to do in the World, consists in the careful use and good husbandry of our time; for without this, neither of the other can be promoted and carried on to any purpose. Time is the season and opportunity of carrying on of any work, and for that reason is one of the most valuable things; and yet nothing is more wastfully spent, and more prodigally squandred away by a great part of Mankind than this, which next to our Immortol Souls is of all other things most precious; because upon the right use or abuse of our time, our Eternal Happiness or Misery does depend. Men have generally some guard upon themselves, as to their Mony and Estates, and will not with eyes open suffer others to rob and deprive them of it; but we will let any body almost rob us of our time, and are contented to expose this precious Treasure to every bodies rapine and extortion; and can quietly look on, whilst Men thrust in their hands, and take it out  
by



by whole handfals, as if it were of no greater value than Silver was in *Solomon's* days, no more than *the stones in the street*. And yet when it is gone, all the Silver and Gold in the World cannot purchase and fetch back the least moment of it, when perhaps we would give all the World for a very small part of that time, which we parted with upon such cheap and easie terms.

Good God ! what a stupid and senseless Prodigality is this ! do we consider what we do, when we give away such large portions of our time to our ease and pleasure, to diversion and idleness, to trifling and unprofitable Conversation, to the making and receiving of impertinent visits, and the usual and almost inseparable attendants thereof, spiteful observations upon them that are present, and slandering and backbiting those that are absent ; (For the great design of most People in visits, is not to better one another, but to spie and *make* faults, and not to *mend* them ; to get time off their hands, to shew their fine Cloaths, and to recommend themselves to the mutual contempt of one another, by a plentiful impertinence ;) when we part with it by whole-sale

sale in sleep and dressing, and can spend whole Mornings between the Comb and the Glass, and the Afternoon at Plays, and whole Nights in Gaming, or in Riot, and Lewdness, and Intemperance; in all which People commonly waſt their Mony and their time together !

Nay how do even the best of us misplace this precious Treasure ; and tho' we do not employ it to wicked purposes, and in Works of Iniquity, yet we do not apply it to the best and noblest use, to the Glory of God, and the Good and Salvation of Men ! By thus laying out this Treasure, we might *lay up for our selves treasures in heaven*, and help others on in the Way thither.

Thus our Blessed Saviour employed his precious time, in *going about doing good*, in all kinds and upon all Occasions, healing the Bodies, and enlightning the Minds, and saving the souls of men : This was his Business, and this was his delight ; it was *his meat and drink*, and his very Life, he spent himself in it, and sacrificed his Ease, and his Safety, and his Life to these great Ends, for which he came into the World ; he  
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considered the Goodness and the Greatness of his work, and the little time he had to do it in, which made him incessantly industrious in it, and to run the Race which was set before him with great speed, and *to work while it was day*, because he knew *the night would come when no man can work*. And this brings me to the

*Second* thing, I observed from the Text, namely, that there is a certain and limited time for every man to do this Work in, *while it is day: I must work the works of him that sent me, whilst it is day*. And this day comprehends all the Opportunities of our Life, which will soon be over, and therefore had need to be well spent. A great part of our Life is past, before the Season of Working begins; it is a great while before the use of our Reason begins, and we come to have our Senses exercised to discern between Good and Evil; before our Understandings are ripe for the serious Consideration of God and Religion, and for the due Care of our Souls, and of the Eternal Concernment of another World; so that this first part of our Life is in a great Measure useless, and unprofitable to  
us

us, in regard to our great Design. For Infancy and Childhood are but the Dawnings of this Day, and no fit time to work in; and Youth, which is as the Morning of this day, tho' it is the Flower of our Time, and the most proper season of all other for the Remembrance of God, and the Impressions of Religion; yet it is usually possess'd by Vanity and Vice; the common Custom and Practice of the World, hath devoted this best part of our Age to the worst Employments, to the Service of Sin and of our Lusts. How very few are there that lay hold of this Opportunity, and employ it to the best Purposes! And yet the following Course of our Lives, doth in a great measure depend upon it; for most Persons do continue and hold on in the Way in which they set out at first, whether it be good or bad. And those who neglect to improve this first Opportunity of their Lives, do seldom recover themselves afterwards. God's Grace may seize upon Men in any part of their Lives; but according to the most ordinary Methods of it, the Foundations and Principles of Religion and Virtue are most commonly laid in a pious and virtuous Education.

education. This is the great Opportunity of our Lives, which settleth and fixeth most Men, either in a good or bad Course; and the Fortune of their whole Lives does usually follow it, and depend upon it.

'Tis true indeed our Day continues many times a great while longer, and we are to work while it continues; and 'tis never too late to begin to do well, and to enter upon a good Course: but there is no such proper and advantageous Season for the beginning of this work, as in our youth and tender years. *This is the accepted time, this is the day of salvation.* God's Grace is then most forward and ready to assist us; and we are then least of all indisposed for the receiving of the Impressions of it; and the Impressions of it do then go deepest into our minds, and are most lasting and durable. But if we neglect this Opportunity, we provoke God by Degrees to withdraw his Grace, and to take away his holy Spirit from us, and by degrees we settle in vicious Habits, and are every day more and more *hardned through the deceitfulness of sin.* It is never too late to work while the day lasts; but the sooner we begin this work, and set about it in good earnest,



earnest, the easier we shall find it; if we defer it late, every step will be up the Hill, and against the Grain.

*Thirdly*, After this Season is expired, there will be no further Oportunity of working; when this day is once at an end, then *cometh the night when no man can work*. The Night is a time unfit for work, when we can hardly do any thing, if we had never so great mind to it; and there is such a Night coming upon every one of us, and Wo be to us if we have our work to do when the Night overtakes us.

There is usually an Evening before this Night, when it will be very difficult for us, and next to impossible, to do this work; and this is the time of Sickness and Old Age, in which men are commonly unfit for any work; but most of all that which requires the whole force and vigour of our Minds, the business of Religion. If we attempt this work then, we shall go very heartlessly about it, and do it very imperfectly, and be forc'd to flubber it over, and to huddle it up in great haste and confusion, and so as we can hardly hope that God will accept it. For how unfit are Men to do any thing, when they are full of the Sense of their



own Infirmities, and Life it self is become so great a Burthen to them, that they are hardly fit to stand under it! how incapable shall we then be of doing the greatest and most momentous work of our Lives, when our Faculties are almost quite spent and worn out, and all the Powers of Life are decayed in us ; when our Understandings are dark and dull, our Memories frail and treacherous, and our *hearts* hard & *deceitful above all things!* When Sickness and old Age overtake us, we shall then find to our sorrow, that *sufficient for that day is the evil thereof;* we shall have need then of nothing else to do, but to bear our Infirmities with patience and decency ; and it is well if we can rally together of the broken Forces of our Reason, so much as may be a sufficient Guard to us against Peevishness and Discontent ; we had need then have nothing else to do, but to be old and weak, to be sick and die.

Besides, how can we expect that God should accept of any work that we do at such a time? with what face can we put off God with the dregs of our Life? or how can we hope that he will be pleased with the service of those years, which we our selves *take no pleasure*

*sure in? if we offer the lame in Sacrifice, is it not evil? and if we offer the blind, is it not evil? offer it now to thy Governor, and see if he will be pleased with thee?*

And Sickness is commonly as bad a time as Old Age, and usually intumber'd with greater Difficulties, and clog'd with more Indispositions. If a violent Distemper seize upon us, it many times takes away the use of our Reason, and deprives us of all opportunity of Consideration; it makes us both insensible of the danger of our Condition, and incapable of using the means to avoid it. And if we have neglected Religion before, and have put off the great work of our Life to the end of it, our opportunity is irrevocably lost; for there is nothing to be done in Religion, when our Reason is once departed from us; *the night is then come indeed, and darkness hath overtaken us*; and tho' we be still alive, yet are we as unfit for any work, as if we were naturally dead.

And this is no such rare and extraordinary Case; for it happens to many; and every Man that wilfully defers the work of Religion and Repentance to a dying

dying hour, hath Reason to fear that he shall be thus surprized in his Sin, and Security, and by the just Judgment of God deprived of all the opportunity of Life and Salvation, while he is yet in the Land of the Living.

But if God be more merciful unto us, and visit us with such a Sicknes, as leaves us the use of our Understandings; yet all that we do in Religion at such a time, proceeds from so violent a Cause, from the present terror of Death, and the dreadful apprehension of that Eternal Misery which is just ready to swallow us up, that it is one of the hardest things in the World, not only for others, but even for our selves, to know whether our Resolutions, and this sudden and hasty Fit of Repentance be sincere or not. For it is natural, and almost unavoidable, for a Man to Repent and be sorry for what he hath done, when he is going to Execution: But the Great Question is, what this Man would do, if his Life were spared? whether his Repentance would hold good, and he would become a new Man, and change his former course of Life, or relapse into it again? And it is by no means certain, that he would

would not be as bad as he was before :  
Because we see many, who, when they  
lie upon a Sick Bed, give all imagina-  
ble testimony of a deep Sorrow, and a  
heartly Repentance for their Sins, who  
yet upon their Recovery return to  
their former Sins with a greater appe-  
tite, and make themselves *ten times  
more the Children of wrath than they  
were before.* So that all the work that  
we can do at such a time, ought not to  
be much reckoned upon, and can give  
us little or no Comfort ; because it is so  
infinitely uncertain whether it be real  
and sincere, and whether the effect of  
so violent a Cause would last and con-  
tinue, if the Cause were removed.  
Therefore *we should work while it is day;* for  
whatever we do in this Evening of our  
Lives, will be done with very great diffi-  
culty, and with very doubtful success.

But besides this Evening, there is a  
*night coming when no man can work ;*  
Death will seize upon us, and then our  
state will be irrecoverably concluded ;  
after that it will be impossible for us to  
do any thing towards our own Salvati-  
on, or to have any thing done for us by  
others ; the Prayers of the living will  
not avail the dead, *as the Tree falls so it  
lies ;*

*lies; there is no wisdom, nor counsel, nor device in the grave whither we are going; therefore, according to the Counsel of the Wise Man, what our hand findeth to do, let us do it with our might.*

This Counsel concerns all Ages and Persons. I will apply it to the young, in the words of the wise Preacher, *Eccles. 12. 1. Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them.* To them who are in the vigour of their Age, in the words of the Prophet, *Isa. Ch. 55. 6. Seek the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near.* And to them that are old, in the words of another Prophet, *Jer. 13. 16. Give glory to the Lord your God, before he causeth darkness, and before your feet stumble upon the dark Mountains, and while ye look for light, he turn it into the shadow of death, and make it gross darkness.* And let us every one of us, of what Age or Condition soever, apply it to our selves, in the words of our Blessed Saviour here in the Text, *I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is Day: the Night cometh, when no Man can work.*

FINIS.



